



المهدي

al-Mahdī

and the Secret of the Hidden °Imām

عجل الله فرجه

*notes for a talk given by:
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under the auspices of the °Ahlu-l-Bayt Council*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَتَدَّهُمْ دُرُوحًا
وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ

kataba fī qulūbihimu-l-°īmāna wa ayyadahum bi rūhin minhu
wa yudākhliluhum jannatin tajārī min taḥtiha-l-anhāru khālidīna fihā
raḍiya-llahu °anhum wa raḍū °anh

He has engraved faith on their very hearts
and has strengthened them with a Spirit of His own.

He will usher them into Gardens through which rivers flow
where they shall dwell forever.

Allāh is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him.
(Sūrah al-Mujadila 58:22)



When matters are entrusted to al-Mahdi ﷺ,
Allāh ﷻ will raise the lowest part of the world for him,
and lower the highest places.

So much that he will see the whole world
as if in the palm of his hand.

Bihar al-Anwar: 5: 328

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بِسْمِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ

wa laqadā katabnā fi-z-zabūri min ba°di-dh-dhikri

°anna-l-arḍa yarithuhā °ibādiya-ṣ-ṣāliḥūn

Before this We wrote in the Zabūr (Psalms) after the Message
(given to Mūsā)

“My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth.”

(Sūratu-al-Ambiyā° 21:105:23)

“Even if there remains only one day on earth, Allāh ﷻ will prolong it until He brings forth a pious man from among my progeny so that He will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny.” Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī, v2, p86, v9, pp 74-75

The Prophet ﷺ also said: “al-Mahdī is one of us, the members of the household (Ahlul-Bayt).” Sunan Ibn Majah, v2, #4085

He ﷺ also said: “The Mahdī will be of my family, of the descendants of Fātimah.” *Sunan Abu Dawud*, English version, Chapter 36, Ḥadīth #4271 (narrated by Umm Salma ؓ, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ) and Sunan°Ibn Majah, v2, Ḥadīth #4086

He ﷺ also said: “The Mahdī will appear in my °Ummah (community). He will appear for a minimum of 7 or a maximum of 9 years; at that time, my °Ummah will experience a bountiful favor never before seen. It shall have a great abundance of food, of which it need not save anything, and the wealth then will be in great quantities, such that if a man asks al-Mahdi ؑ to give him some, al-Mahdi ؑ will say: ‘Here! Take!’” Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol. 2, Tradition #5083

He ﷺ also said: “We (my family and I) are members of a household that Allāh ﷻ has chosen for them the life of the Hereafter over the life of this world; and the members of my household (Ahlul-Bayt) shall suffer a great affliction and they shall be forcefully expelled from their homes after my death; then there will come people from the East carrying black flags, and they will ask for some good to be given to them, but they shall be refused service; as such, they will wage war and emerge victorious, and will be offered that which they desired in the first place, but they will refuse to accept it till a man from my family (Ahlul-Bayt) appears to fill the Earth with justice as it has been filled with corruption. So whoever reaches that (time) ought to come to them even if crawling on the ice/snow since among them is the (Kḥalifat-ullāh) al-Mahdī.” Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol. 2, Tradition #4082, *The History (at-Tarikh) at-Ṭabari*

It is also narrated: “In the end of time, my ^o*Ummah* will undergo very hard affliction like never before, so that man can not find any way out. Then Allāh will bring a person from my progeny, that is my Ahlu-l-Bayt, who will fill the earth with justice as it was filled with injustice. The inhabitants of the earth and the inhabitants of the heaven love him. The sky will bring down its water everywhere and the earth will bring all what it can offer and will become green all over.” *aṣ-Ṣaḥihu-l-Hadīth*, by al-Hākīm, as quoted in *as-Sawā’iq al-Muhriqah*, by Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Ch. 11, section 1, p250

Furthermore it is narrated in Ṣaḥīh Muslim that: Jabir Ibn ‘Abdillāh al-Ansari رضي الله عنه said: I heard the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ say: “A group of my ^o*Ummah* will fight for the truth until near the day of judgment when ‘Isā, the son of Maryam, will descend, and the leader of them will ask him to lead the prayer, but ‘Isā عليه السلام will refuse, saying: ‘No, In Truth, Allāh ﷻ has made among you leaders for others and He has bestowed his bounty upon them.’” also *Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, v3, pp 45,384; *Nuzūl ‘Isā Ibn Maryam Akḥir az-Zaman*, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, p57

Ibn Abu Ṣhaybah, the mentor of al-Bukḥarī and Muslim, has reported several traditions about ‘Imām al-Mahdī عليه السلام. He has also reported that the ^oImām of the Muslims who will lead Prophet ‘Isā عليه السلام in prayer is ‘Imām al-Mahdī عليه السلام himself.

Jalaluddin as-Suyuti mentioned: “I have heard some of the deniers [of truth] deny what has been conveyed about ‘Isā عليه السلام that when he descends will pray the Fajr prayer behind al-Mahdī عليه السلام. They say, ‘Isā عليه السلام has a higher status than to pray behind a non-Prophet. This is a bizarre opinion since the issue of prayer of ‘Isā عليه السلام behind al-Mahdī عليه السلام has been proven strongly via numerous authentic traditions from the Messenger ﷺ, who is the most truthful.” And then al-Suyuti goes on narrating some of the traditions in this regard. (See *Nuzūl ‘Isā Ibn Maryam Akḥir az-Zaman*, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, p56).

Also al-Hafidh Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani mentioned that: “The Mahdī عليه السلام is of this ^o*Ummah*, and ‘Isā عليه السلام will come down and pray behind him.” : *Fathu-l-Barī*, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v5, p362

This is also mentioned by another Sunni scholar, Ibn Hajar al-Haythamī, who wrote: “The Ahlu-l-Bayt are like the stars through whom we are guided in the right direction, and if the stars are taken away (or hidden) we would come face to face with the signs of the Almighty as promised (i.e., the Day of Resurrection).

“This will happen when the Mahdī ﷺ will come, as mentioned in the traditions, and the Prophet °Isā ﷺ will say his prayers behind him, the Dajjal will be slain, and then the signs of the Almighty will appear one after another.” *as-Sawā’iq al-Muhriqah*, by Ibn Hajar, Ch. 11, section 1, p234

Also Ibn Hajar quoted Abu al-Ḥusayn al-Ajirī saying: “The traditions of al-Mustafa ﷺ on the rising of al-Mahdī ﷺ have been transmitted via numerous authorities and is more than the level of (being sufficient for) *mutawatir*, describing that he is of his Ahlu-l-Bayt, and will fill the earth with justice, and that °Isā ﷺ will come at the same time and he will assist °Isā ﷺ in killing al-Dajjal in the land of Palestine, and that he will lead this nation and °Isā ﷺ will pray behind him. Abu al-Husain al-Ajiri as quoted in *as-Sawā’iq al-Muhriqah*, by Ibn Hajar, Ch. 11, section 1, p254



وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا أَبَاطًا يُوَفِّقُونَ

wa ja°alnā minhum °ā°imman yahdūna bi-°amrinā lammā ṣabarū
wakānū bi-°āyātina yūqinūn

And We appointed, from among them, leaders (°Ā°imma) ,
giving guidance under Our command,
so long as they persevered with patience
and continued to have faith in Our Signs.

(Sūrah Sajdah 32:24)

بَقِيَّتُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِيظٍ

baqiyyatu-llāhi khayrun lakum in kuntum mu°minīna
wamā anā °alaykum bi-ḥafitḍḥn

“What will remain for you with Allāh is better if you are believers.
And I am not a guardian over you.”

(Sūrah Hūd 11:86)

°Imām al-Mahdi ﷺ is NOT a prophet, and as such he will bring neither a new religion nor a new religious law. He does not cancel any regulations set by the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, but he will renew true °Islām based on the genuine Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

However there are some authentic traditions which state that although °Imām al-Mahdi ﷺ does not bring any new law when he comes, some people will insist he is bringing a new religion because there are some Muslims who have strayed so far from °Islām they do not recognize it when it is shown to them right before their eyes.

Those traditions further explain that it is as a result of many innovations brought by pseudo-scholars, those who are called the Deformers, (Wahaabis, Salafis, Takfiris, Modernists, Progressives etc.), into to the dīn of ʾIslām.

The mission of ʾImām al-Mahdī ﷺ is to positively (rather than negatively) reject ALL the innovations and to revive the true Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ which has become corrupted and altered by people over time. As a result of the ignorance of people regarding the true Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, they think he is bringing a new religion. Some traditions say that ʾImām al-Mahdī ﷺ will also provide the unique interpretation (*tafsīr*/تفسير) of the Qurʾān but, again, this is due to general and wide spread ignorance of the people concerning the meaning of Qurʾān and specifically their rejection or simple lack of knowledge¹ of the relationship of Walāyah (ولاية) to Nubūwa (نبوة). Had they taken or made the time for study and understanding, they might have greatly profited by a deeper explanation (*taʾwīl*/تأويل) of the Qurʾān.

In any case given the extensive and well-documented ḥadīth concerning al-Mahdī ﷺ, as well as tangential references in the Qurʾān to his being, coming and mission we feel that there can be no argument as to his ﷺ existence and unique mission on this earth.

Having said that, we can next say that there do remain major differences in the understanding of who or what al-Mahdī ﷺ is among the different schools of ʾIslām, specifically the Sunni viewpoint, the Shiʿah viewpoint and the more gnostic or baṭanī Ṣufī viewpoints.

What I hope to do in this bayān is to open out to the reader these three viewpoints, thus adding, inshaʾ Allāh, to the overall knowledge of the reader/listener on this very important subject.

Before doing that I will first review what are called the “Signs of the Tme” which, are shared, mostly by Sunnis and Shiʿah alike.

In short it is held that there are many signs that will precede him ﷺ, but one general and very important sign is that he will come at a time when there is great confusion, intense disputes and violent deaths, when people are afflicted by disturbance and experiencing great fear. Calamities will fall upon the people, so much so that a man shall not find a roof to shelter himself from oppression and loss. There will be many battles and fiṭnā before his ﷺ appearance.

1. Due, perhaps, to the overall dumbing down of the level of teaching and teachers over the past few hundred years in the ʾIslamic world. Generally speaking across the Muslim world, Islāmīc Studies are the least valued subject in the curriculum. (Medicine followed by Sciences are the highest.)

Every time a fitnah comes to an end, another will start, spread and intensify. The people will be troubled to such an extent that they will long for death. It is then that ʾImām Mahdī ﷺ will be sent.

Abu Saʿīd al-Khudri has reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “He will be sent at a time of intense disputes and differences among people and earthquakes...” (Aḥmad)

One of these, given events in Syria (I am writing this in the Autumn of 1412/2013) is of great interest:

The Sufyani (descendants of Abu Sufyan) will emerge before Imam Mahdi from the depths of Damascus. The Aḥādīth regarding the Sufyani specify that they (or he) is a tyrant who will spread corruption and mischief on the earth before al-Mahdī ﷺ. When he hears about al-Mahdī ﷺ, he will send an army to seize and kill him. However the earth will swallow this army before it even reaches al-Mahdī ﷺ.

Abu Hurayrah ؓ has narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said: “A man will emerge from the depths of Damascus. He will be called Sufyani. Most of those who follow him will be from the tribe of Kalb. He will kill by ripping the stomachs of women and even kill the children. A man from my family will appear in the Haram, the news of his advent will reach the Sufyani and he will send to him one of his armies. He (referring to Imam Mahdī ﷺ) will defeat them. They will then travel with whoever remains until they come to a desert and they will be swallowed. None will be saved except the one who had informed the others about them.” (*Mustadrak*)

Among some of the signs are these:

1. The vast majority of people who profess to be, and call themselves, Muslim will be so only in name despite their practice of ʾIslāmīc rites and it will be they who make war with the al-Mahdī ﷺ.
2. Before his coming will come the red death and the white death, killing much of the world’s population. The red death signifies violence and the white death is plague. One third of the population will die from the red death and the other third from the white death.
3. Several figures will appear: the one-eyed Antichrist (Masih ad-Dajjal), the al-Harthī, al-Manṣūr, Shuʿayb bin Saleh and the Sufyani.
4. There will be a great conflict in the land of Syria, until it is destroyed.
5. Death and fear will afflict the people of Baghdad and Iraq. A fire will appear in the sky and a redness will cover them.

Other signs include:

Shāḥr ibn Hawshāb said that the Prophet ﷺ stated: “There will be a Sound in (the Hijri Islamic month of) Ramadan, a *mahmaha* (murmuring) in (the Hijri Islamic month of) Shawwal, and war among tribes (peoples) in (the Hijri Islamic month of) Dhul-Qai’dah and its sign will be that pilgrims will be looted. There will be a war with many people killed and blood will be shed in Mina (near Makkah), such that their blood flows on the Jamra (Stone of Satan at which pilgrims throw stones).” (Abu Amru Uthman bin Sa’id ad-Dani’s *Kitāb as-Sunan al-Waredah fi-l-Fiṭan*)

‘Alī bin Abi Ṭalib ؑ said: “Wait for the end of misery once three things occur.” We said: What are they, Oh Prince of Believers? He said: “The dispute among the people of ash-Shām (Greater Syria), the Black Banners (battalions carrying black banners), and the Qaḍ’a in the month of Ramaḍān. It was asked: “What is the Qaḍ’a ? He said: “Haven’t you heard what Allāh said in the Qur’an (26:4): *إِنْ نَشَاءُ نُنَزِّلْ عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ آيَةً فَظَلَّتْ أَعْنَاقُهُمْ لَهَا خَاضِعِينَ* ‘If We wish, We can send down to them from Heaven a sign, such that their necks remain surrendered to it (mesmerized in amazement).’ This ‘āyāt (sign) that makes a girl come out of her bedroom, wakes up the person who is asleep, and frightens the one who is awake.” (Ibn ash-Shajāri *āl-Amali ash-Shajaria*)

In addition to different sounds that will be heard there are celestial phenomenæ² that will be widely observed across the world.

Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah said: “For our Mahdī ؑ, there will be two signs that have never occurred since the creation of the heavens and the earth: The moon will be eclipsed (lunar eclipse) on the first night of Ramaḍān, and the sun will be eclipsed (solar eclipse) in the middle (of Ramaḍān).” (‘Alī bin ‘Umar ad-Daraqutnī’s *Sunan as-Daraqutnī*)

“There are two signs for the Mahdī. The first one is the lunar eclipse on the first night of Ramadan, and the second is the solar eclipse in the middle of this month.” (Ibn Hajar al-Haythami’s book *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi ‘Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar*, p. 47

“A lunar eclipse will occur in the first night of the Ramaḍān. In the middle of the Ramaḍān, a solar eclipse will occur.” (Muḥammad al-Barzanjī, *al-Isha’ah li Ashrat as-Sa’ah*, p. 199)

2. note: many of these ḥadīth have weak ‘isnad and other questionable features, but they have persisted over time in the eschatological thoughts and considerations of the Muslim community.

“During his reign, on the 14th of Ramaḍān, a solar eclipse will occur. On the 1st of that month, the moon will darken...” (°Imām Rabbānī, *Letters of Rabbānī*, 380; *Letters of Rabbānī*, 2-1163)

“There will be two solar eclipses in Ramaḍān before the Mahdī’s advent.” (°Imām Qurtubī’s book *Mukhtasar Tazkirah* , p. 440)

“When you see it, then store up one year’s supply of food.” (Nu’aim ibn Hammad’s book *Kitāb al-Fiṭan*)

5) The Sun makes a Sign (or rises as a sign)

Ali bin Abdullah bin Abbās said: “The Mahdī will not emerge until the Sun rises as a sign (or unless a sign emerges from the Sun).” (a-Bayhaqī, al-Ḥākim, al-Harbī, as-Suyuti, Nu’aim bin Ḥammad’s *Kitāb al-Fiṭan*, Ibn Hajar al-Haythami’s book *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi ‘Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar*, p. 47, Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi’s book *al-Burhan fi Alamat al-Mahdi Akhir al-Zaman*, p. 33) Another variation says a sign appears with the sun.

Abi Ja’far said: “If the Abbās reach Khorasan, (a star known as) Horn Zu-Shifā’ rises in the East. The first time it appeared was at the perishing of the people of Nuḥ ؑ when Allāh ﷻ drowned them. And it rose at the time of °Ibrāhīm ؑ when they cast him into fire, and when Allāh ﷻ caused Firawn (at the time of Mūsā ؑ) and those with him to perish, and when Yaḥya (the Baptist) ؑ son of Zakariah ؑ was killed. If you see this, seek refuge in Allāh ﷻ against the evilness of *fiṭan* (strife and tribulations). It will rise after the eclipse of the sun and the moon. Then, soon ‘Abqa’ (a man seeking to rule) in Egypt will appear.” (Nu’aim bin Ḥammad’s book *Kitāb Al-Fiṭan*, al-Muttaqi al-Hindi’s book *al-Burhan fi ‘Alamat al-Mahdi Akhir az-Zaman*, p. 32)

Ibn Masūd said: “There will be a sign in (the month of) Safar and the star with a tail will begin.” (Nu’aim bin Ḥammad’s book *Kitāb al-Fiṭan*)

al-Walid said: “The redness and stars we have seen are not the °āyāt (signs). The star of the °āyāt (signs) is a star that flips (or turns) in the horizons in (the month of) Safar or in (the 2 months of) Rabi (the first and second Rabi), or in (the month of) Rajab. Once this happens, Kḥankan marches and the Turks (Russians); the Romans (Europeans) of Zawahir will follow with the banners (battalions) and Crosses.” (Nu’aim bin Ḥammad’s book *Kitāb Al-Fitan*)

Ka’b said: “It is a star that rises from the East and illuminates for the people of the Earth like the illumination of a moon in a full-moon night.” (Nu’aim bin Ḥammad’s book *Kitāb Al-Fitan*)

Ka'b said: "A star will rise from the East before the appearance of the Mahdī and it has a tail." And Sharik said: "Before the appearance of the Mahdī, the sun will have an eclipse in the month of Ramaḍān twice." (Nuaim bin Hammad's book *Kitāb al-Fiṭan*)

"A star with a tail that illuminates all places will originate from the East, at three or seven-day intervals." (Muhammad Al-Barzanji's book *al-Iṣḥā'ah lī Ashrat as-Sā'ah*)



The list of Signs of the Times goes on and on in both Sunni and Shī'ah eschatological literature³ and is quite extensive. As to what can be considered sound and what is dubious I leave that to the muḥaithīn and encourage the reader or listener to make use of the ample opportunities afforded by the many pages of the internet devoted to this subject. What we can say for sure is that the time leading up to the appearance or re-appearance of al-Mahdī ﷺ will be filled with fitnah, wars and natural calamities.

°Abdullah ibn °Umar said: While we were sitting with the Prophet ﷺ he mentioned the Fitan (strife, trials and tribulations), mentioning many of them until he mentioned the *fitnah* (strife, trial & tribulations/فتنة). Someone asked him: 'O Messenger of Allāh, what is the Fitan? He said 'It is fleeing and plunder'. Then, will come the *Fitnah of as-Sarra'* (a fitnah that rises from ahlu-l-bayt itself): its smoke is under the feet of a man (descendant) from my household (family), who claims he is of me (my follower), but he is not because my °Awlyia (close followers or friends) are those who fear Allāh ﷻ. Then the people will choose a man (to be a leader) who will be like a hip-bone on a rib (meaning he will not be able to hold a firm leadership grip). Then the *Duhayma* (darkness & cunning) catches people off guard. Fitnah that will not leave anyone without slapping him a slap (testing his faith); if people say it is finished, it stays longer; a man who is in the morning a Mu'min (believer) by the evening becomes a Kafir (disbeliever), until people will be divided into two factions: a faction of °Imān or faithfulness in belief without any hypocrisy and a faction of hypocrisy without °Imān. When this happens, expect the (Fitnah of) Dajjal that day or the very next." (Sunan Abu Da'ūd, al-Ḥākim, and az-Zahabi)

3. Please note I do not mention Šū' eschatological literature. Though Šu' generally believe in the reality of these and other signs they, especially the more gnostic or baṭīnī amongst them, have quite a different view of the whole situation which we will, inṣḥā' Allāh address later on in this bayān.

With these two things understood – The reality of al-Mahdi ﷺ and the general fitnah, discord, and signs both earthly and celestial that will attend his manifestation – let me now try to clarify the various narratives of the Sunnis, Shi‘ah and Ṣūfis⁴ surrounding him ﷺ.

Basically you could say that Sunnis think he is sure to come but yet to be born; the Shi‘ah think he is born, (some thousand years ago), is still alive but is in occultation waiting the right time to manifest publically; and the Ṣūfis who maintain that he is both born, present, here, and always was here, but is available only to those who purify their hearts sufficiently.



The Sunnis view the Mahdi as an ordinary man⁵ in the image of the Prophet ﷺ, who said of him, “His name will be my name, and his father’s name my father’s name.” (Sunan Abu Dawud, 11/373; Sunan Ibn Mājah, 2/1368) The Prophet said ﷺ: “The Mahdi is of my lineage, with a high forehead and a long, thin, curved nose. He will fill the earth with fairness and justice as it was filled with oppression and injustice, and he will rule for seven years.” (Sunan Abi Daud, *Kitāb al-Mahdi*, 11: 375, ḥadīth 4265; *Mustadrak al-Ḥākim*.) He is expected to be born in the midst of world-wide cataclyms and, when he comes to maturity, to re-establish righteousness, and renew the caliphate.

Umma Salmah ؓ said, “His ﷺ aim will be to establish a moral system from which all superstitious ideas have been eliminated.” In the same way that students or reverts enter ‘Islām, so unbelievers or doubting Muslims will come to believe

Taken as a whole, we can say that there are a lot of ḥadīth about the Mahdī to be found in books of Ahlu-s- Sunnah of varying quality.

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4. By Sunnis here I do not mean those people who dress up and act as if they are ūber-muslims with immahs, miswaks, beards and ankle length pants etc. but in reality are involved in massive drug dealing (think Ṭaliban), bomb throwing and acid wielding psuedo-sala‘ tak‘ri wahhabi ikhwan fanatics, nor by Shi‘ah do I mean those people who were fooled by the so-called ‘Prince’ Ismail who, by coercion, converted Iran overnight from Sunnism to Shism, importing religious authorities from the Levant in an attempt to create a Persian political counterbalance to Osmani Turkey and Mughal India, and thereby subverted true Shism into an altogether different and overtly political entity thus altogether betraying the inner truth of Shism. Nor by Ṣū’s do I mean those who regard Ṣu‘sm as a kind of psuedo-Spiritual Social club or groups of sycophantic servile self-seekers who gather around arrogant pretentious superstar shuyukḥ seeking to bask in their reected light.
 5. An ordinary person in the sense that he is not infallible, nor is he supernatural.

They run the gamut between fabricated, weak, and good. Ḥadīth graded as authentic are *few*. However, belief in the appearance of the Mahdī ﷺ is an established matter, taking all of the evidence together. Additionally many Sunnis seem to be of the opinion that although there are many ḥadīth that give an established meaning when taken together, most of them do not make the grade of authenticity when taken on their own. It may be the case that only one ḥadīth out of all of them can actually be considered authentic. The ḥadīth that can be graded as good are very few. The vast majority of these ḥadīth in the opinions of the scholars are weak.

However many scholars *have* written on the topic of the Mahdī ﷺ. One of these was Na'īm b. Ḥamād who wrote on this matter in his book *al-Fitan* from which we have quoted earlier. Though a leading scholar of the Sunnah, nevertheless Ḥamād used to make many errors. Daraqutnī, al-Dhahabī, and Ibn Hajar have all made note of this, but mainly in regard to his reports concerning battles. Ibn Kathīr, al-Suyutī, al-Sakhāwī, al-San'ānī, and ash-Shawkānī, among others have written on it, not to mention a number of contemporary authors.

Ibn Khaldūn, in his *Muqaddimah*, writes: “The popularly accepted view among Muslims is that the Mahdī is real. There is no doubt that this is the correct view, for the vast majority of the leading scholars and people of knowledge acknowledge the ḥadīth about the Mahdī as a whole, even though few of the individual ḥadīth about him are free of criticism. There are even scholars who have declared the ḥadīth about him to be *mutawātir*, especially among the later scholars. There are others, however, who have rejected outright all the ḥadīth pertaining to the Mahdī.”⁶

The more recent fatwa in this issue is given in Makkah by the Muslim World League (*Rabitatul 'Alamu-l-'Islāmi*) on Oct. 11, 1976 (23 Shawwal 1396). This fatwa states that more than twenty companions narrated traditions concerning al-Mahdi, and gives a list of those scholars of Hadith who have transmitted these narrations, and those who have written books on al-Mahdi. The fatwa states:

“The memorizers (*ḥafidhūn*) and scholars of Ḥadīth have verified that there are authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and acceptable (*ḥasan*) reports among the traditions related to al-Mahdi. The majority of these traditions are related through numerous authorities (*mutawātir*).

6. Note: A ḥadīth is considered *mutawātir* if it has been narrated by such a large number of people that it is a practical impossibility for them to have conspired together to lie or fabricate.

There is no doubt that the status of those reports are *ṣaḥīḥ* and *mutawātir*. (They have also verified) that the belief in Mahdī ﷺ is obligatory, and that it is one of the beliefs of Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama'ah. Only those who are ignorant of the Sunnah and innovators in doctrine deny it."

In short in looking at various ḥadīth from the six books of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ at-Tirmidhī, Sunan Ibn Majah, Sunan Abu Dawud, and Ṣaḥīḥ al-Nisa'i we can say that from a Sunni perspective 'Imām Mahdī ﷺ is a reality but one of many dimensions and understandings. Here are basic Sunni references:

1. *Ṣaḥīḥ Tirmidhī*, V2, P86, V9, PP 74-75
2. *Sunan Abi Dawūd*, V2, P7
3. *Muṣnād Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal*, V1, P376 & V3, P63
4. *Mustadrak al-Ṣaḥīḥain*, by al-Hakim, V4, P557
5. *al-Majma'*, by Tabarani, P217
6. *Tahdhīb al-Thābit*, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, V9, P144
7. *Sawā'iq al-Muhraqa*, Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, P167
8. *Fathu-l-Barī*, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, V7, P305
9. *al-Tathkirah*, by al-Qurtubī, P617
10. *al-Hawi*, by al-Suyuti, V2, pp165-166
11. *Sharḥ al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyyah*, by al-Zurqani, V5, P348
12. *Fathu-l-Mughith*, by al-Sakhawi, V3, P41
13. al-Hafidh Abul-Ḥasan Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Sijistani
14. ash-Shafi'i and also Ibn Habban, Abu Nua'ym, Ibn Asakir, etc.



The bridge between the Sunni narrative and the Shi'ah narrative is to be found in the famous ḥadīth of the twelve successors.

Narrated Jabir bin Samura: I heard Muḥammad ﷺ saying, "There will be twelve Muslim rulers." He then said a sentence which I did not hear. My father said, "All of them (those rulers) will be from Quraysh." [Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī 89.329]

Narrated Jabir bin Samura: I heard the Prophet ﷺ say, "This (Islamic) *dīn* will continue until the Hour (day of resurrection), having twelve Caliphs for you; all of them will be from Quraysh." [Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim : Book 020: Number 4477, 4478, 4480, 4481, 4482, 4483]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "This religion remains standing until there are twelve vicegerents over you, all of them agreeable to the nation, all of them from Quraysh." [Sunan Dawud : Book 36: Number 4266]

The Prophet ﷺ said: “After me there will be twelve Amirs (Princes/ Rulers), all of them from Quraysh.” [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Arabic) *Chapter of Fitan*, 2:45 (India) and 4:501 Tradition # 2225 (Egypt) Hadith #2149 (numbering of al-°Alamiyyah)]

Masrūq states that someone asked Abdullah Ibn Masood, “Oh Abā Abd al-Rahmaan, did you ask the Messenger ﷺ how many khalīfah will rule this nation?”. Abdullah Ibn Masood replied, "Yes, we did and he replied, “Twelve, like the number of chiefs (*nuqabā*) of Bani Israel”” [*Muṣnad Aḥmad*, vol 1, pg 398]

There are also similar reports from Sunni and Shi°ah texts combined. The Prophet ﷺ was quoted as saying,

“Surely Islam will always remain mighty until there are twelve caliphs in it. All of them will be of the Quraysh. [*Musnad Tayalesi*, vol 3, pg 105 Tr. No 767 and vol 6, pg 180 Tr. No 1278, published at Hyderabad, India in 1321 A.H] [*al-Mu°jam al-Kabīr*, vol 2, pg 258, Tr. No. 1964] [*al-Fitan*, vol. 1, pg 39, Chap 7, Tr. No. 2] [*al-Malāhim wa-l-Fitan* pg 32, chap 29] [*Musnad-e-Aḥmad*, vol 5, pg 93] [*Sunan Abi Dawud*, *Kitāb al-Mahdī*] [*Tārikḥ-e-Baghdad*, vol 12, pg 126, No. 516] [*al-Bidāya wa-n-Nihāyah*, vol 1, pg 18]

“There will be twelve khalīfah after me, all of them will be from Quraysh.” [*Musnad-e-Aḥmad*, vol 5, pg 92] [*Kanz al-Ummal*, vol 12, pg 33, Tr. no 33860 narrating from Tabraani and Tr. No. 33803, narrating from Tirmidhī] [*Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, Chap 46, Tr. No. 2223] [*Tārikḥ-e-Baghdad* vol 14, pg 353, No.7673] [*al-Mo°jam al-Kabīr*, vol 2, pg 236. Tr. No. 1875 and pg 248, tr. No. 1923 and pg 251, Tr. No 1936 and pg. 283 Tr. No. 2063 and vol 2, pg 215, Tr. No 1799.] [*al-Gḥaybah* of Nu°mani, pg 123 chap 6, Tr. No 14, and pg 120, Chap 6, Tr. No. 8] [# *Kifāyā al-Asrar*, pg 50, Chap 6, Tr. No. 2] [*Nihāyah al-Bidāyah wa-n-Nihāyah* vol 1, pg 17] This continues for 112 ḥādīth all more or less of the same order and all more or less to the same point.

“There will be twelve caliphs for this nation”

“Surely this religion will always overcome its opponents and no enemy or deserter can ever harm it till there are twelve khalīfah from my nation in it. All of them will be from Quraysh”

This affair (°Islām) shall always remain mighty, impregnable and victorious against all its opponents till it is ruled by twelve, all of them will be from Quraysh”

“This affair (Islam) shall always remain righteous till there are twelve chiefs. All of them will be from Quraysh.”

“This affair shall always remain closely united till there are twelve caliphs in it all of them will be from Quraysh”

“This affair will always survive till there are twelve chiefs in it. All of them will be from Quraysh.”

“This affair (°Islām) shall always remain upright till there are twelve chiefs. All of them will be from Quraysh.”

“This affair shall neither pass nor will come to an end till twelve khalīfah pass in it. All of them will be from Quraysh.”

“This religion shall survive till the Hour is established or there are twelve khalīfah over you. All of them will be from Quraysh.”

“There will be twelve strong supports for this nation. Whoever forsakes them will not harm them. All of them will be from Quraysh.”

“This affair shall always overcome the one who opposes it. No enemy or opponent will harm it till there will be twelve khalīfah from Quraysh.”

“Surely this affair shall always remain dominant. No opponent can harm it till there are twelve chiefs. All of them will be from Quraysh.”

“This affair of this nation (Islam) shall always be dominant till there are twelve chiefs or khalīfah. They are all from Quraysh.”

“The affair of this nation shall always remain straight and dominant over its enemy till there are twelve khalīfah amongst them. All of them will be from the Quraysh.”

“There will be twelve strong people from the Quraysh. The one who bears enmity against them, his enemy will not harm them.”

“Twelve will follow this affair (Islam). All of them will be from Quraysh and their likes will not be seen again.”

Abdullah ibn Masood on being asked if he asked the Messenger ﷺ about how many khalīfah will rule this nation. He replied in the affirmative and said that the Messenger replied, “Twelve, like the number of chiefs (*nuqabaa*) of Bani Israel,”

“Know that the affair of my nation shall always be righteous till there are twelve khalīfah in it. All of them will be from the Quraysh.”

“This religion shall always be upright till there are twelve from Quraysh. When they are no more, the earth will be destroyed (swallowed) with all its inhabitants.

I am not seeking here to belabor the point but to make clear to the reader or listener of the ubiquity in this matter of the 12 Khulafaah.



In short the Hadith of the Twelve Successors is a well-known ḥadīth attributed to the Prophet ﷺ by both Sunni and Shi'ah transmitters of ḥadīth according to which he ﷺ without doubt predicted that there would be twelve caliphs after him, all from his tribe, the Quraysh.

As I said this is the bridge which links Sunni tradition to Shi'ah tradition though, predictably due to those who have sought to divide the community, differing understandings of the Ḥadīth of the Twelve Successors have come to prevail over time.

The more extreme Sunni view is the Ḥadīth of the Twelve Successors is an example of a "self-fulfilling prophecy". Therefore, before we begin, we must define what exactly is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We read on the website of www.ahlelbayt.com, which is website is dedicated to those members of the Prophetic Household (the Ahlu-l-Bayt) who have been abandoned and forsaken by the Shi'ah: "A self-fulfilling prophecy is a prediction that, in being made, actually causes itself to become "true".

To give an example of a self-fulfilling prophecy, we have the literary story of "Romulus and Remus": according to legend, Romulus and Remus were in their childhood sentenced to death for fear of a prophecy that one day they would kill the king. However, Romulus and Remus escape death and later in life they hear stories of the prophecy; after hearing these prophecies, Romulus and Remus realize that their destiny in life is to kill the king, and they then proceed to do exactly that.

In other words, a self-fulfilling prophecy is a statement which may sufficiently influence people in such a way that their reactions ultimately fulfill (or seem to fulfill) the prophecy. The prophecies of various religious persons have always been the victims of this problem, whereby people seek to fulfill the prophecy themselves. As for the Hadith of the twelve Caliphs, the Prophet ﷺ prophesized that there would be twelve Caliphs after him, and thereafter various so called *deviant sects* 'fulfilled' this prophecy by laying claim to political authority by putting forward their own twelve Caliphs.

There is no doubt that the Prophet ﷺ did in fact prophesise in ḥadīth that there would be twelve khalīfah, and many Sunni scholars do believe that the last of the twelve will be °Imām al-Mahdi ﷺ, who will fill the earth with justice. This is most definitely a belief of the majority of Ahlu-s-Sunnah wa Jama'ah, well-known to the scholars even if it is not well-known amongst the generality (*al-amm*) from amongst the Sunnis.

“After the Prophet ﷺ made this statement, there were many deviant sects which sought to exploit this ḥadīth and other similar prophecies in order to bring themselves to power. The Shi‘ah were one such group, who used this Ḥadīth – along with those about Imam Mahdī ﷺ – in order to place their own sect into power. It was based upon the ḥadīth of the twelve khalīfah that the Shi‘ah decided to limit their ʾĀʾimmah to the number twelve. Hence we read: “These and other traditions (*ḥadīth*) were spread in both ʾImamī and Zaydī circles...According to as-Saduq these traditions (*ḥadīth*) and others predicting the occurrence of the Ghayba (occultation) were the main reason for the ʾImamī acceptance of the Ghayba and for their being satisfied that the series of the Imams should stop at the twelfth.” (The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background, by Dr. Jassim M. Hussain, p.138)

In other words, the ʾĀʾimmah of the Imāmī Shi‘ah would not have ended at the number twelve had it not been for this Ḥadīth of the twelve khalīfah found in mainstream Muslim books of Ḥadīth. It was this ḥadīth which was one of the “main reasons” that caused the Shi‘ah to terminate the ʾĀʾimmah at the number twelve. It is therefore based on very backwards and circular logic that the Shi‘ah should now use this Ḥadīth as proof for their twelve ʾImāms, when in fact it was they who based their belief on Sunni Ḥadīth! Today we have Shi‘ah who attack Sunnis saying “how could it simply be a matter of coincidence that your ḥadīth also tell you about these twelve ʾImāms?” Of course it is not a coincidence! It is the Shi‘ah (say the Sunnis extremists) who based their deviant beliefs on our ḥadīth, and so it is very queer of them to then further our ḥadīth as proof of their beliefs! This is very backwards and circular logic! It is placing the carriage before the horse, reversing cause and effect! They go on to say, “In fact, had the Sunni Hadith stated that there were eleven khalīfah instead of twelve, then the Shi‘ah would have claimed that their ʾImāms were eleven in number.

Dr. Hussaini says further on this subject, “And once again, they would have come to us with incredulous looks on their faces, saying what a “miracle” it was that their beliefs can be “proven” from our books. Had it been thirteen Caliphs mentioned in the Sunni books of Hadith, then the Shi‘ah would have ended the Imamah at the number thirteen. The proof for the termination of the Shi‘ah Imamah was based on Sunni ḥadīth, so there is therefore no surprise at the concordance between the number of Caliphs in Sunni ḥadīth and the number of Shi‘ah Imams.”

Here we get to the crux of the differences, “Indeed, the Shi‘ah in actuality did not have twelve ‘Imāms, but *eleven*. The eleventh ‘Imām, Ḥasan al-Askari, died without leaving behind a son to succeed him. In fact, Ḥasan al-Askari’s own family were completely ignorant of the existence of any child of his, and Ḥasan al-Askari’s estate had been divided between his brother Ja‘far and his mother (instead of any to the son). Moojan Momen writes in “An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam” (London, 1985, p. 162) that, “Jafar remained unshakeable in his assertion that his brother (Hasan al-Askari) had no progeny.” We read:

“The majority of the Imamites...denied his birth or even his existence, and mocked those who believed in him. According to al-Nu‘mani the bulk of these groups abandoned their belief in the Imam. In fact those who continued to hold a firm belief in his Imamate were a small minority belonging to the circles of narrators, like Ibn Qubba and al-Nu‘mani himself, who based their belief on the traditions of the Imams (i.e. the Hadith of the Twelve ‘Imāms).”

Many scholars shared the perplexity of the Imamite masses over the prolonged occultation of the twelfth Imam. (*The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background*, by Dr. Jassim M. Hussain, p.143)

“Indeed, if Hasan al-Askari really had a child, then why did his own family not give a share of the inheritance to him? To deal with this inconsistency, the ‘Imāmī Shi‘ah of the time denounced Ja‘far as being “*al-Kadhāb*” (the Liar/الكذاب), and they came up with the fantastic story that the eleventh ‘Imām had a son but that this son was hidden from view (i.e. he was in occultation).”

“In order to “prove” the existence of this mysterious son, the ‘Imāmī Shi‘ah actually brought forward the ḥadīth of the twelve ‘Imāms and others similar to it, in order to somehow prove that the ‘Imāmah could not possibly have ended at eleven persons but must be twelve in number. Nonetheless, such fantastic explanations did not fool the a large number of the ‘Imāmī Shi‘ah who “apostatized” from ‘Imāmī Shi‘ism in order to return and embrace Sunni Islam or, else, other branches of Shi‘ism. In fact, the Shi‘ah movement split into at least fifteen different sects after the eleventh ‘Imām’s death, some of these sects claiming that the ‘Imāms were only eleven in number (and ended with Hasan al-Askari).”

A group from amongst the Zaydis revered twelve ‘Imāms, but they believed in a different set of twelve ‘Imāms than the ‘Imāmī Shi‘ah.

These Zaydīs believed in the first four of the ʾImāms of the Imami Shīʿah, but they disagreed with the ʾImāmī Shīʿah as to who the other eight of them were. This group of Zaydīs, like the Sunnis, believed that the Kḫalīfah was not limited to twelve, but the Zaydīs argued that the twelfth would be al-Qaʾim and he would lead an armed and political insurrection. A similar view was held by another heretical sect, namely that of the Ismaʿīlis who used the Ḥadīth of the twelve kḫalīfah in order to further their own set of ʾImāms. And there were many other groups who used the Ḥadīth of the twelve Caliphs – and other Ḥadīth in regards to ʾImām Mahdī – in order to bring themselves to power. We read:

(That these traditions were used by) “numerous Islamic groups, particularly the Zaydīs, in their struggle for power during the Umayyad period shows that these traditions were well-known among the Muslims of that period.”

A fact unknown to lay-persons is that the Ḥadīth of the Twelve Successors is exploited by not only the ʾImāmī Shīʿah but by many other sects. Interestingly, many of these sects have a more convincing argument for their claims over that of the ʾImāmī Shīʿah! For example, the ʿIbādīs – descendants of the Khawārij – use the Ḥadīth of twelve kḫalīfah in order to validate the claims of their leaders, who were twelve in number. The ʿIbādīs claim that this ḥadīth is a “shining proof” for their twelve Caliphs, which include: Abu Bakr ﷺ, Umar ﷺ, Abdullah ibn Yahya al-Kindi, and the nine ʿIbādi Imams of the Rustamid Dynasty.

It is interesting that in modern times the Nation of Islam also used the Ḥadīth of the Twelve Successors in order to validate their leader Elijah Muhammad by claiming that their founder, W. D. Fard, was one of the twelve ʾImāms:

“Now there are twelve (12) Imams or Scientists, who have been ruling all the time, and one of the twelve is always greater than the other eleven.” (*Muhammad Speaks* newspaper)

So you see the waters surrounding this subject of the Twelve Successors are very murky indeed and it is very difficult to sift fact from fiction, truth from imagination etc. And partly this is so because all we have been dealing with, for the most part, are the outer manifestations of what in truth is an *inner reality*.

ʾInshaʾAllāh as we proceed further we will begin to delve into this inner reality instead of the various arguments of different schools and be able to see the reality from the inside out rather the outside in.

Until now we have been mainly looking at the issue of the Maḥḍī ﷺ from, first a general or *soft* Sunni view and then, from a more hard line Sunni view, which gives little credence at all to the Shi'ah view and indeed only imagines most of it to be a subterfuge for the gaining of power, spoils or authority in the general complicated and confused situation that affected the Muslim world from the time of the struggle between the Ummayyads and the Abbasids, or one might even say from the time of the seizure of power by Mu'awiyah (“I am the last of the *khulafah* and the first of the kings of ‘Islām”) and the other political machinations which followed and continue right up to the present.

Let us now look at the issue from the view that the Shi'ah are sincere in their beliefs and constructs of what the sunnah is and how to follow it faithfully and fully and that they in fact are truly the ones who actually do and have obeyed Allāh ﷻ and his Prophet ﷺ.

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ

‘atī‘u-llāha wa-r-rasūla

Obey Allāh and the Prophet.

(Sūrah ‘Āl ‘Imrān, 3:32)

and then let us recall the ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth quoted in 112 Sunni sources:

عن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله وصحبه وسلم, قال: من كنت مولاه فعلي مولاه

“*man kanat mawlahu fa-‘alī mawlahu*”

“Whose *mawla* (master) I am, Alī is his *mawla* (master).”

adh-Dḥahabi said: “As for the ḥadīth, “If I am someone’s *mawla* then ‘Alī is his *mawla* too”, it has jayyid isnāds.” It was classed as *sahīh* by al-Albānī in *al-Silsilah al-Saheehah*, 1750, and he criticized those who said that it is *da‘īf* (weak) saying that it has a ṣaḥīḥ ‘isnād going back to the Prophet ﷺ. Here is one version in full:

“When the Prophet ﷺ alighted at the pool of Khumm, he took ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib ﷺ by the hand and asked those present, ‘Do you not know that I am closer to the believers than they themselves?’ They replied, ‘Certainly.’ He ﷺ then asked, ‘Do you not know that I am nearer to every believer than he himself?’ They replied, ‘Certainly.’ He ﷺ then said, ‘Allāh, he whose *mawla* I am has ‘Alī as his *mawla*. O Allāh, be friendly to those who are friendly to him and hostile to those who are hostile to him.’ After that ‘Umar ﷺ met him and said, ‘Congratulations, Oh son of Abu Ṭālib. Morning and evening you are the *mawla* of every believing man and woman.’” al-Tirmidhī Ḥadīth 6082 as narrated by Zayd ibn ‘Arqām ﷺ.

Here we arrive at and enter into another long contentious argument or discussion as to the meaning of the word “*mawla*” in Arabic but first let us look at what the Prophet ﷺ himself said.

“Nor shall anyone clarify its interpretation, other than the one that I have grasped his hand, brought up beside myself, (and lifted his arm), the one about whom I inform you that whomever I am master of, °Alī is his master (*mawla*/مولى); and he is °Alī Ibn Abi Ṭalib, my brother, the executor of my will (*wasiyyah*/وصية), whose appointment as your guardian and leader has been sent down to me from Allāh, the mighty and the majestic.” [Sahih Tirmidhi, v2, p298, v5, p63 – also in *Muṣṣanad* of °Imām Hanbal, *Mishkat al-Masabih* by Tabrizi

However, some Sunnis like to contend and argue, in spite of the fact that a great number of Sunni scholars have declared the wide-scale transmission (*tawatur*) of the ḥadīth of Ghādīr al-Khumm, just as they advocate the validity of its chain of transmission, its soundness, and its clear signification for the Imamate of °Alī ibn Ṭalib رضي الله عنه as well as his direct succession from the Prophet ﷺ.

Abu al-Khayr Shams ad-Dīn ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Jazri ash-Shāfi‘i says in respect to the ḥadīth of al-Ghādīr: “It has been widely transmitted from Fāṭimah رضي الله عنها, in the same way that it, i.e. the ḥadīth of al-Ghādīr, has been conveyed with a wide-scale transmission from the Prophet ﷺ.”

A large number of transmitters have reported it, so there is no regard for one who seeks to weaken it from among those who have no knowledge of this discipline. For it has been reported by way of traceability from Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, °Umar ibn al-Khattab, Talhah ibn °Ubayd Allāh, al-Zubayr ibn al-°Awwam, Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas, °Abd al-Rahman ibn °Awf, al-°Abbas ibn °Abd al-Muttalib, Zayd ibn Arqam, Bura’ ibn °Azib, Buraydah ibn al-Ḥusayn, Abu Hurayrah, Abu Sa’id al-Khudri, Jabir ibn °Abd Allāh, °Abd Allāh ibn °Abbas, Habashi ibn Junadah, Sumrah ibn Jundub, Anas ibn Malik, and Zayd ibn Thabit رضي الله عنه.

But it’s *meaning* all hinges on the meaning of the word “*mawla*”. Morphologically, the Arabic word *mawlā*, also transliterated *mawlah*, is composed from the morpheme indicating place, lit. ‘noun of place’ (°ismu-l-makān) and derives from the root word ولي *waliya* (*masdar*/verbal noun: الولاية / al-wilāyah) classically translated as to be proximal to both parties in a vertical relationship or to intercede on behalf. Thus the semantic translation of *mawla* most closely resembles the phrase “place of intercession” or “being of intercession”.

Historically, the word *mawla* has been interpreted to mean either master, protector or supporter; *walī*, *wilāyah*, ‘*awliya*’ are its supporting synonyms.

A *mawla* usually means the one who has more authority over believers than they have on themselves. It can also mean a much more elevated person or exalter person such as a “master,” “lord,” “vicar” or “guardian.” It also has other secondary meanings such as – ‘protector’, ‘master’, ‘supporter’, ‘slave’, ‘emancipated slave’, ‘helper’, ‘friend’, ‘loved one’ etc.

Allāh ﷻ uses the word *Mawla* with various meanings in the Qur’ān, as can be seen in the following random selection of translations by Muslims and non-Muslims of ‘āyāh 47:11 in Sūrah Muḥammad: Transliterated: *Dhālika bi-anna-llaha mawla alladhīna ‘amanū waanna alkafireena la mawla lahum*

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ مَوْلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَأَنَّ الْكَافِرِينَ لَا مَوْلَى لَهُمْ

Pickthall: That is because Allāh is *patron* of those who believe, and because the disbelievers have no *patron*.

Yusuf Ali: That is because God is the *Protector* of those who believe, but those who reject God have no *protector*.

Shakir: That is because Allāh is the *Protector* of those who believe, and because the unbelievers shall have no *protector* for them.

Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar: That is because God is the Defender of those who believed. And for the ones who are ungrateful, there is no defender of them.

Wahiduddin Khan: That is because God is the *protector* of the believers, and those who deny the truth have no *protector* at all.

T.B.Irving: That is because God is the *Protector* of those who believe, while disbelievers have no *protector*.

al-Muntakhab: That is because those whose hearts reflect the image of religious and spiritual virtues are under the tutelage of Allah, whereas those who deny Him are under the tutelage of nobody.

Sh. N. Durkee: That is because Allāh is the *Protector* of those who believe and those who hide the truth have no *Protector*.

Abdel Haleem: That is because God *protects* the believers while the disbelievers have no one to *protect* them:

Aisha Bewley: That is because Allah is the *Protector* of those who have iman and because those who are kafir have no *protector*.

Ahmed Ali: This is so for God is the *friend* of those who believe while the unbelievers have no *friend*.



With that understanding it must then also be seen that each of the Twelve Successors are basically endowed with the same characteristics and imbued with the same qualities as was °Alī ؑ himself.

One might think of it as twelve different bodies with one spirit who are the spiritual and political successors to the Prophet ﷺ, in the Twelver or Ithna-°ashariyyah branch of Shī°ah °Islām. According to the theology of Twelvers, the successor of Muḥammad ﷺ is an infallible human individual who not only rules over the community with justice, but also is able to keep and interpret the Divine Law and its esoteric meaning. The Prophet ﷺ and the °Imāms' ؑ words and deeds are a guide and model for the community to follow; as a result, they must be free from error and sin, and must be chosen by divinely sanctioned designation, or *nass*, through the Prophet ﷺ. It is believed by Twelvers that the Twelve °Imāms were foretold in the Ḥadīth of the Twelve Successors which we have just mentioned.

It is further believed in Twelver and °Ismā°ili Shī°ah °Islām that °aql (عقل), or what we may call divine wisdom as such, was the source of the souls of the the Prophets ﷺ and the °Imāms ؑ and gave them an esoteric knowledge called *ḥikmah* (حكمة) and that their sufferings were a means of divine grace to their devotees. Although the °Imām ؑ was not the recipient of a divine revelation, he had a close relationship with Allāh ﷻ by which he was himself guided, and the °Imām ؑ in turn guides people. The °Imām ؑ was also guided by secret texts he had, such as *al-Jafr* and *al-Jami°ah*. This belief in the Divine Guide is a fundamental tenet in the Twelver and °Ismā°ili branches and is based on the concept that Allāh ﷻ would not leave humanity without access to divine guidance.

According to Twelvers, there is always an °Imām ؑ of the Age, who is the divinely appointed authority on all matters of faith and law in the Muslim community. °Alī ؑ was the first °Imām ؑ of this line, and in view of the statement of the Prophet ﷺ at Ghadir al-Khumm (“Whose *mawla* I am, °Alī is his *mawla*”), the rightful successor to the Prophet ﷺ, followed by male descendants of the Prophet ﷺ through his daughter Fā°imah az-Zahra ؑ. Each °Imām ؑ was the son of the previous °Imām ؑ, with the exception of Ḥusayn ibn °Alī ؑ, who was the brother of Ḥasan ibn °Alī ؑ.

The twelfth and final °Imām ؑ is Muḥammad al-Mahdi, son of Ḥasan bin °Alī al-Askari ؑ, the Guided One, believed by Twelvers to be still alive, but, due to the political climate, hidden or occluded until he reappears to bring justice and understanding to the world.

It is also necessary to know that all of the ʾImāms ﷺ met with an unnatural death, with the exception of the last ʾImām Muḥammad al-Mahdi ﷺ, who the Twelvers believe is living in Occultation and, as such, is from time to time in subtle contact with different people in different places, all of whom are sworn to silence in this matter.

According to the Twelvers, ʾImām Muḥammad al-Mahdi ﷺ was born in 869 (15 Šaʿbān 255 AH) and assumed Imamate at 5 years of age following the death of his father Hasan al-Askari ﷺ. In the early years of his Imamate he would only contact his followers through four deputies. After a 72-year period, known as the Minor Occultation, a few days before the death of his fourth deputy, Abul Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Samarri in 941, he is believed to have sent his followers a letter in which he declared the beginning of Major Occultation, during which al-Mahdi ﷺ is not in overt open contact with his followers, though he has been seen by some.⁷

To understand the reason for occultation of al-Mahdi ﷺ one must understand the political situation of the times. The dispute over the right successor to Muḥammad ﷺ resulted in the formation of two main schools, the Sunni and the Šhiʿah. The Sunni, or followers of the Sunnah, accepted the caliphate and maintained the premise that *any* devout Muslim could potentially become the successor to the Prophet ﷺ if accepted by his peers. The Šhiʿah however, maintain that only the person selected by Allāh ﷻ and announced by the Prophet ﷺ could become his successor, thus ʿAlī ﷺ became the religious authority for the Šhiʿah people. Militarily established and holding control over the Umayyad (pronounced and spelled more like “*Umayya*” in Arabic) government, many Sunni rulers perceived the Šhiʿah as a threat, both to their political *and* religious authority.

The Sunni rulers under the Umayyads sought to marginalize the Šhiʿah minority and later the Abbasids turned on the Šhiʿah and further imprisoned, persecuted, and killed them. The persecution of Šhiʿah throughout history by their Sunni co-religionists has been characterized by brutal and genocidal acts. Comprising only around 12-18% of the entire Muslim population, to this day, the Šhiʿah remain a marginalized community in many Sunni Arab dominant countries without the rights to practice their religion and organize.

7. As we have mentioned, followers of Sunni Islam and some minority Šhiʿah (especially the ʾIsmaʿīlis) schools believe that al-Mahdi e has not yet been born, and therefore his exact identity is only known to Allāh u. Aside from the precise genealogy of al-Mahdi e, Sunnis accept many of the same hadiths Šhiʿah accept about the predictions regarding his emergence, his acts, and his universal world Leadership.

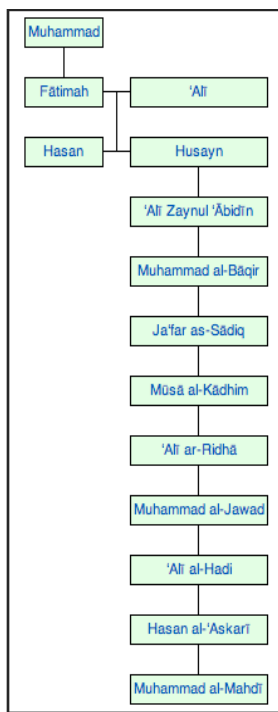
The line of succession of the twelve °Imāms ﷺ and the given cause for their deaths.

°Alī, Amir al-Mu'minin (1st Imam) murdered
 al-Ḥasan (2nd Imam) poisoned
 al-Ḥusayn (3rd Imam) killed in battle
 °Alī Zaynu'l-`Abidin (4th Imam) poisoned
 Muḥammad al-Baqir (5th Imam) poisoned
 Ja°far as-Sadiq (6th Imam) poisoned
 Musa al-Kazim (7th Imam) poisoned
 °Alī ar-Rida (8th Imam) poisoned
 Muḥammad at-Taqi (9th Imam) poisoned
 °Alī al-Hadi (an-Naqi) (10th Imam) poisoned
 al-Ḥasan al-°Askari (11th Imam) poisoned
 Muḥammad al-Mahdi (12th Imam) occlusion

Throughout history, the Shi'a have faced persecution by many different political and religious authorities. Under the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, who were at the forefront of carrying out brutal atrocities, many Shi°ah would be imprisoned, persecuted and killed simply on account of being Shi°ah. The persecution carried out, predominantly by the adherents of the Sunni denomination, has often been characterized by brutal and genocidal acts. Persecution under the rule of the Abbasid caliphs also gave rise to the heavily practiced concept of *taqiyyah* (dissimulation/تقية) which is a legal dispensation whereby believers may conceal or even deny their faith and religion when they are under threat, persecution, or compulsion. *Taqiyyah* was developed to protect Shi°ah who were often in the minority and under pressure.

Taqiyyah can also be related to the esoteric nature of early Shi°ah °Islām. The knowledge (°ilm) given to the °Ā°immah ﷺ had to be protected and the truth must be hidden before the uninitiated or their adversaries until the coming of the al-Mahdi ﷺ, when this knowledge and ultimate meaning can become known to everyone.

This last point brings up to what actually were the teachings of the °Ā°immah ﷺ beyond the role of providing commentary and interpretation of the Qur°an as well as guidance to their followers. If the reader/listener will remember, in my earlier talk on Muḥammad ﷺ as the Seal of the Prophets and Prophecy itself, I explicitly brought together the two fields of Nubuwwah (النبوة) and Walāyah (ولاية) or Revelation and Explanation to explain their complimentary nature.



In very simple terms we might give an example: the majority of people do not understand astro-physics or molecular biology and if an ordinary person were to be given a standard graduate studies textbook on either of these subjects or others like them (say quantum mechanics or bio-medical ethics) the chances are that, even armed with a textbook, the reader would not really be able to understand what in the world was being discussed.

So now let's take the Qur'ān which is in fact an other worldly artifact. First of all it is written in Arabic, and though quite a few people can actually read it at most 25% (and that is being exceedingly generous) can really understand the words themselves, never mind what lies above and beyond in the depths of those words.

So as Muslims, though we can say, as ʿUmar رضي الله عنه did, “we have The Book and that is sufficient for us”; in fact, though there are many things we can understand, even in translation, such as don't eat the meat of dead animals or pigs, or don't drink fermented beverages, or fast during the month of Ramaḍān or pay your zakat (ʿāyāt that are *Muhkamāt*, entirely clear and plain) etc. there is much more of the Qur'ān that we really don't understand (*Mutashabihah*) such as “Allāh is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth.” (24:35). Question: does that mean the light coming from a light bulb is Allāh ﷻ?) or “Allāh is seated on a throne” and “Wherever you turn there is the face of Allāh”, so how can that be that Allāh ﷻ is in one place (His Throne) and at the same time Allāh ﷻ is everywhere?

Obviously one needs someone who knows what these ʿāyāt mean and who can explain them. That someone is called a “teacher” and since these are spiritual matters we can call this person a wali or one who is capable of practicing wilayat or explaining what is not known.

And that, precisely and with many more additional ramifications, is who the Aʿimmah عليهم السلام are: ʿawliyah-ullah or the Friends of Allāh ﷻ.

﴿ مِنْ آيَاتِ الْحِكْمَةِ ﴾

In it are verses that are entirely clear

As “containing proof of the Lord, immunity for the servants and a refutation of opponents and of falsehood. They cannot be changed or altered from what they were meant for.” who also said, “As for the unclear ʿāyāt, they can (but must not) be altered and changed, and this is a test from Allāh ﷻ to the servants, just as He tested them with the allowed and prohibited things. So these ʿāyāt must not be altered to imply a false meaning or be distorted from the truth.”

Therefore, Allāh ﷻ said,

﴿فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ﴾

So as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation
(meaning, those who are misguided and deviate from truth to falsehood,)

﴿فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَبَّهَ مِنْهُ﴾

they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof
(meaning, they refer to the Mutashabiha, because they are able to alter its meanings to conform with their false interpretation since the wordings of the Mutashabiha encompass such a wide area of meaning. As for the Muḥkam āyāt, they cannot be altered because they are clear and, thus, constitute unequivocal proof against the misguided people. This is why Allāh ﷻ said such people are)

﴿اذْغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ﴾

seeking Fitnah

(dissension, argument, confusion etc.)

(meaning, they seek to misguide their followers by pretending to prove their innovation by relying on the Qurʾān – the *Mutashabihah* of it – but, this is proof against and not for them. For instance, Christians might claim that ʿIsā ﷺ is divine because Allāh ﷻ calls him in Qurʾān “Ruḥullāh” or the Spirit of Allāh and also calls him “His Word” (*kalimatahu*), which He gave to Maryam ʿ, all the while ignoring other statements,)

﴿إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا عَبْدٌ أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَيْهِ﴾

ʿIsā was not more than a servant. We granted Our favor to him.

﴿إِنْ مِثْلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمِثْلِهِ ۖ أَدْرَأَ أَنْ تَخْلُقُوهُ مِنْ دُخَانٍ مُكَرَّمٍ ۚ لَكُمْ فِي كُنْ فَيَكُونُ﴾

(Truly, the likeness of ʿIsā before Allah is the likeness of Adam. He created him from dust, then (He) said to him: “Be!” and he was.)

There are other āyāt that clearly assert that ʿIsā ﷺ is but one of the creatures of Allāh ﷻ and that he is the servant and Messenger of Allāh ﷻ, among other Messengers.

The statement of Allāh ﷻ,

﴿وَأَنْتَغَايَا وَيْلَهُ﴾

(And seeking for the Taʾwil)

inner meanings to alter them as they desire

Aḥmad recorded that ʿAʿishah ؓ said, “The Prophet ﷺ recited,

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُشَبَّهَاتٌ﴾

It is He Who has sent down to you the Book.

In it are verses that are entirely clear,

they are the foundations of the Book;

and others not entirely clear

until he ﷺ reached,

﴿أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ﴾

Men of understanding)

and he said,

﴿فَإِذَا رَأَيْتُمُ الَّذِينَ يَخَادِلُونَ فِيهِ، فَمِنْ الَّذِينَ عَنِ اللَّهِ، فَاخْذَرُوهُمْ﴾

When you see those who argue in it (using the Mutashabihat),
then they are those whom Allāh ﷻ meant:

Therefore, beware of them.”

al-Bukhārī recorded a similar ḥadīth in the Tafsir of this Ayah (3:7),
as did Muslim in the book of Qadr (the Divine Will) in his Ṣaḥīḥ.
Abu Daud in the Sunnah section of his *Sunan*, from ʿAʿishah ؓ;
"The Messenger of Allah recited this Ayah,

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ﴾

It is He Who has sent down to you the Book.

In it are verses that are entirely clear, — until,

﴿وَمَا يَذْكُرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ﴾

And none remember except those of understanding.

He then said,

﴿فَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ؛
فَأُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ سَمَى اللَّهُ، فَاخْذَرُوهُمْ﴾

When you see those who follow what is not so clear of the Qur'an,
then they are those whom Allāh described, so beware of them.

This is the wording recorded by al-Bukhārī and can serve as a short
example of a classical exegesis (*tafsir*) of a few ʿāyāt of the Qurʾān.

Tafsīr is generally understood as being a more outer meaning of an
ʿāyāt but when we talk of the teachings of the Aʿimmah ؓ then we
are talking of *taʾwīl* or the deep intense inner meanings of Qurʾān.

And this for twelve generations was one of the services which the A'imma ؑ provided for those in the community who were prepared to obey Allāh ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ when he said, "Whose mawla I am Alī is his mawla." Because, as we said earlier, it was one "mind" or one "heart" or one "understanding" in a multiple of bodies.

It is necessary to repeat that according to the theology of Twelvers, the successor of Muḥammad ﷺ is an infallible human being who not only rules over the community with justice, but also is able to keep and interpret the complete Shari'ah (شريعة) and its esoteric meaning. The Prophet ﷺ and words and deeds of the 'Ā'imma ؑ are a guide and model for the community to follow; as a result, they must be free from error and sin, and must be chosen by divine decree, or *nass*, directly transmitted through the through Prophet ﷺ and his Successors ؑ. Furthermore it is believed that Muḥammad ﷺ designated all 12 successors by name and that they inherited a special knowledge of the true meaning of the scripture that was passed from father to son, beginning with the Prophet ﷺ himself.

And also to repeat that in the Shi'ah school it is believed that 'Aql (عقل), a divine wisdom, is the pre-eternal source of the souls of the prophets and imams ؑ who were given esoteric knowledge, called *Hikmah*, (الحكمة) and that their sufferings in this world as a result or persecution were a means of divine grace to their devotees. Although the 'Imām ؑ is not a recipient of a divine revelation he has close relationship with Allāh ﷻ, through which Allāh ﷻ guides him, and the 'Imām ؑ in turn guides the people. The 'Imāmat, or belief in the divine guide is a fundamental belief in Shi'ah 'Islām and is based on the concept that Allāh ﷻ would not leave humanity without access to divine guidance and direct spiritual instruction.

I repeat the two paragraphs above because it is necessary to really understand the basis of where the Shi'ah are rooted.

Following are a sample of what came out of their mouths.

'Imām 'Alī Ibn Abi Tālib ؑ, the first Imam said.

"There is never a successful outcome in treating people unjustly."

"It is love which brings those closer who are remote by ancestry, and it is (the absence of) love which causes dissociation between those who are related by ancestry."

'Imam al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Alī al-Mujtaba ؑ, the second Imam said.

"Never will a people be salvaged who win the consent of their fellow creatures at the cost of the dissatisfaction of the Creator".

°Imām al-Ḥusayn Ibn °Alī ؑ, the third °Imām, said:

“The greatest right which is on you is from Allāh Himself and this is the root of all other rights. The greatest right of Allāh on you is to worship Him without associating anything with Him. If you do that with purity of heart, He promises to give you sufficiently what you need here and in the next world.”

°Imām °Alī Ibn al-Ḥusayn as-Sajjad ؑ, the fourth °Imām, said:

“Imām Muḥammad al-Baqir ؑ once said to one of his companions: “Oh Jabir, it is not enough that a person says; I am a Shī‘ah and I love the Prophet ﷺ and his family and the °Imāms ؑ. By Allāh ؑ a Shī‘ah is one who is perfectly pious and obedient to the commands of Allāh ؑ. Anyone else is not a Shī‘ah no matter how much they say they love °Imām °Alī ؑ and no matter what they call themselves. Oh Jabir our Shī‘ah are known by these signs: (a) They are truthful, trustworthy and loyal; (b) They always remember (*dhikr*) Allāh ؑ; (c) They offer their prayers, observe fasts, and recite Qur‘an; (d) They help their neighbors, take care of orphans, and say nothing but good of people; (e) They act with utmost politeness, concern and care towards their parents; (f) They are worthy of the trust and confidence of their fellow human beings.”

°Imām Muḥammad al-Baqir ؑ, the fifth °Imām, said:

“The most perfect of men in intellect is the best of them in ethics.”

°Imām Ja‘far Ibn Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq ؑ, the sixth °Imām, said:

“Whenever people committed new sins which they didn't use to do, Allāh ؑ gives them new afflictions which they didn't expect”

°Imām Mūsā Ibn Ja‘far al-Kazim ؑ, the seventh °Imām, said:

“The one (al-Ḥusayn ؑ) for whom the day of Ashūra is a day of tragedy, grief and weeping, Allāh ؑ Mighty and Glorious, shall make the Day of Judgment, a day of joy and happiness for him”.

°Imām °Alī Ibn Mūsā ar-Riḍā ؑ, the eighth °Imām, said:

at-Tawbah (G–d consciousness or awareness of Allāh/التوبة) depends upon four things: sincere regrets, verbal asking of forgiveness (°istighfār/استغفار), deeds and determination never to repeat the sin”.

°Imām Muḥammad Ibn °Alī aj-Jawad ؑ, the ninth °Imām, said:

“No one can describe Allāh ؑ with attributes other than those with which He describes Himself. How can anyone describe Him when senses are too short to perceive Him, illusions are too short to comprehend Him, ideas are too short to mark Him, and sights are too short to appreciate Him?”

“He is remote in His nearness and near in His remoteness. He created the how without being asked “how?” and founded the where without being asked “where?” He is not in how and where. He is the One and Only. Exalted be His Majesty and sacred be His Names”.

°Imām Alī Ibn Muḥammad al-Hadi ؑ, the tenth °Imām, said:

“A time will come when the people’s faces would be laughing (exalting) and their hearts would be dark, bleak and dirty. The sunnah to them would be innovation and heresy and innovation would be (considered) sunnah among them. The faithful would be belittled and debased among them, and the transgressor would be honorable and respectful among them. Their lords and chiefs would be ignorant and aggressive. And the religious scholars would be on the threshold of the aggressors and tyrants.”

°Imām Ḥasan Ibn °Alī al-Askari ؑ, the eleventh °Imām, said:

“When Allāh ﷻ permits us (i.e. the Ahlu-l-Bayt) to speak, truth will prevail and falsehood will vanish.”

°Imām Muḥammad Ibn Ḥasan al-Maḥdi ؑ, the twelfth °Imām, says:

“People are slaves to the world, and as long as they live favorable and comfortable lives, they are loyal to religious principles. However, in hard times, the times of trials, true religious people are scarce.”

°Imām al-Ḥusayn ؑ, the third holy °Imām, said:

“Everything has a foundation, and the foundation of °Islam is love of the Ahlu-l-Bayt”.

The Prophet ﷺ says,

“If man perceived his death and its speed towards him, he would certainly detest the world and its fragile hopes.”

°Imām °Alī ؑ says:

“A free man remains free under all circumstances. He will be patient if he suffers from a calamity. He will not break down if he is stormed with catastrophes, even if he is captured in war, or is hurt and his comfort turns into hardship. An example is the Prophet Yusuf ؑ, who was sold, imprisoned and tortured, but his freedom was not affected in the least. The darkness of the well (in which he was left by his brothers), and whatever else that happened to him did not hurt him at all. Then Allāh ﷻ honored him and turned the tables. He made the oppressor who ruled over him his servant. He appointed Yusuf ؑ as His Prophet, and brought His Mercy upon a nation through him.”

“This is an example of practicing the art of patience well. You should be patient, too. You will be victorious. Remain patient until you receive divine rewards.”

°Imām Ja°far Ibn Muḥammad aṣ-Ṣādiq, ؑ the sixth °Imām, said:

“If you scold a child, be sure to leave him room to turn away from his wrong action. In this way you do not leave him with obstinacy as his only way out.”

°Imām °Alī Ibn Abi Ṭālib ؑ says that the Prophet ﷺ said:

“Oh Fāṭimah! Every eye shall be weeping on the Day of Judgment except the eye which has shed tears over the tragedy of al-Ḥusayn ؑ for surely, that eye shall be laughing and shall be given the glad tidings of the bounties and comforts of Paradise.” *Bihar al-Anwar*, Volume 44 page 193

°Imām °Alī Ibnu-l-Ḥusayn ؑ, Zaynul-°Abidin ؑ, the fourth °Imām said: “Every Mu°min (believer), whose eyes shed tears upon the killing of al-Ḥusayn ؑ and his companions, such that the tears roll down his cheeks, Allāh ﷻ shall accommodate him in the elevated rooms of paradise.” (Yannābe° al-Mawaddah, pg.: 429.)

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“I am leaving among you that which if you hold onto you will never go astray after me. One of them is greater than the other. It is the Book of Allāh, a rope stretching from the heaven to the earth. The other is my °itrah (progeny), my Ahlu-l-Bayt. The two will never be separated until they reach me at the Pond (*al-hawḍ*/الحوض). Watch closely how you treat them both after me.” Sunan al-Tirmidhī 5/663 No. 3788; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 031:5920

°Imām Ali Ibn Abi Talib ؑ the first °Imām said:

“I have never argued with an ignorant fool and won; nor have I argued with a rational person and lost.”

“Oh people, know that maturity in religion lies in the pursuit of knowledge and putting it into practice. Indeed! The pursuit of knowledge is more incumbent upon you than endeavor for livelihood; for, your livelihood has been apportioned and guaranteed by Allāh the Just One and will be provided to you. Knowledge is stored with its possessors and you have been commanded to acquire it from them.”

These are just a few more or less random sayings culled from the talk of the °Aimmah to give the reader/listener a taste of where they are coming from. If you want to know more there are a plethora of books, videos and websites available containing their wisdom.

One of the reasons I am writing this bayan is that I, like many Muslims, am sickened by the wars and killings in Syria, Pakistan, al-Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Yemen, Egypt etc of Muslims killing Muslims because of sectarian differences, The Prophet ﷺ said that “The differences in my community are a blessing,” There are various versions of this statement. In some versions it is mentioned, “The difference of opinions among my Companions is a mercy for you.” Or “The difference of opinions of my Companions is a mercy for my ^oUmmah.”⁸ ^oIslām teaches that when there is a scholarly disagreement on a certain issue, it is impermissible to condemn a person who follows a position that is different from one’s own. The requirement to command the right and forbid the wrong does not apply when there is ^oIkhṭilāf upon a position.

It should be clear to any thinking Muslim that the present situation of Sunnis vs. Shī‘ah etc is a failed and ultimately destructive position for our ^oUmmah. In the end all face the same qiblah, we all use the same Book, we all have the same Prophet ﷺ and we all say, Lāa ʾillaha ʾillāh Allāh...and according to Ṣaḥīḥ Ḥadīth “whoever says there is no god but Allah will enter the garden.” (كل من يقول هناك) ⁹ ¹⁰ (إذا لا إله إلا الله دخل الجنة) so what in the end is all this killing, rape, murder, torture, kidnapping, extortion, corruption all about?

This madness is mainly driven by ignorance and the shayṭanic statement “I am better than he is”, as well as by those people seeking fame or fortune who believe and act on the rule, “Divide and Conquer”. We need to learn about and from each other for that is the way of the Prophet ﷺ who was (and is) Mercy (*rahmah*) to all beings.

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8. These is disagreement on the authenticity or strength of this ḥadīth but this disagreement is mainly connected to the strength of the narration rather than the actual words or wording of the ḥadīth itself and it continues to be widely quoted all across the Muslim world. For instance just recently in Nigeria we found the following legal opinion (fatwa) advanced, “According to a saying of Prophet Muhammad the differences of opinion (^oIkhṭilāf) between his faithful (^oUmmah) constitute a form a blessing (see A.A. Oba, Islamic Law as Customary Law: The Changing Perspective in Nigeria, International and Comparative Law Journal 51 (2002) 817).
 9. The Prophet a said: “Whoever says: there is no god but Allāh enters Paradise.” Tabarani narrated it from Abu Dharr in the Kabir (7:55), Ibn Hibban in his Ṣaḥīḥ (31), al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (4:251), al-Mundhiri in at-Targhib (2:422), al-Haythami in Majma‘ az-Zawā‘id (1:18), Ibn ‘Adi (7:2639), Abu Nu‘aym in the Hilya (7:174), and al-Bazzar from ‘Umar.
 10. The Prophet a said: “Whoever says there is no god but Allāh enters Paradise even if he commits adultery and even if he steals (i.e. even if he commits great sins).” (Nasa’i, Tabarani and others from Abu al-Darda’ - judged ṣaḥīḥ).

So I write these bayan in the hope they will be an aid to that understanding and that we will all become members of the ideal community of the middle way in accordance with the words of Allāh ﷻ.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ
وَيَكُونَ الرُّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

wa kadhalika ja'alnakum 'ummatan wasatan
li takūnū shuhadā'a 'ala-n-nāsi
wa yakūna-r-rasūlu 'alaykum shahīda

In this way We have made you a community of the center,
[or the middle way or the way of the heart]
so that you may act as witnesses against mankind
and the Messenger as a witness against you.

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:143)

So I deeply encourage all my readers and listeners to look more deeply and study and read about that which you may not yet know in the hopes that the knowledge you will receive will bring about peace and reconcillation within the Muslim community.



Here I would like to speak and write more about that middle way of *haqiqah* that joins the *dhāhir* and the *bātin*.

That realm or dimension of the center where the light by which He guides conjoins the light to which one is guided, the person sees the realm of the heavens and the earth and he perceives the secret of destiny – (*qadr*) – how it controls created things – and this is His ﷻ saying: ‘Light upon Light’” (24:35) “...an essential point in the heart, equivalent to the pupil in the eye which is the locus of vision...; if there is rust on the heart the existence of this point will not be manifest. All of the spirits (*arwah*) which are in the human being, such as Intelligence and others, anticipate the witnessing of this point. Thus, when the heart becomes polished through meditation, *dhikr*, and (Qur^{ān}) recitation then this point will become apparent. When it manifests that which is in it which parallels the essential presence of Allāh ﷻ,¹¹ there spreads out from that point a light because of the theophany, and it flows to all corners of the physical body and captivates the mind and more. Then the light and its rays fill the eyes of the heart, dazzling them.”

11. Neither My Heavens nor My Earth contain Me, but the heart of My Believing Servant contains Me. (mā wasi'anī arđi wa lā samā'ī wa lākin wasi'anīee qalbi 'abdi-l-mu'min.) (ما وسعني أرضي ولا سمائي ولكن وسعني قلب عبدي) (Hadīth al-Qudsi, al-'Ihya of 'Imām al-Ghazālī)

Whereas Sunnis believe that al-Mahdī ﷺ is yet to be born (or born but not manifest) and Shi'ah believe he is born and alive but in occultation and therefore unavailable to believers – both schools believe his coming or returning will not take place without untold suffering and world-wide cataclysm, the people of *haqiqah* – people of the community of the middle believe he is to be found in the heart.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ
وَيَكُونَ الرُّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

wa kadhālaka ja' alnākum 'ummatan wasaṭan
li-takūnū shuhadā'a 'ala-n-nāsi
wa yakūna-r-rasūlu 'alaykum shahīdā

In this way We have made you a community of the middle,
so that you may act as witnesses against mankind
and the Messenger as a witness against you.

(Sūratu-l-Baqara 2:143)

Amir-Moessi writes that, *ar-Ru'ya bi-l-qalb* which might be translated as “vision with the heart” or “vision in the heart,” appears to be a spiritual application of facts relating to the °Imām’s ﷺ pre-existential luminous entity, its doctrinal foundation being found in cosmogonic elements of °Imāmology and in certain aspects of °Imāmite theology. This idea...founded on what might be called “subtle anatomy,” leads into an anthropological dimension of °Imāmism and reveals another little-studied subject, that of the early practices of °Imāmī spirituality...and the question of the vision of Allāh ﷻ. This problem, its possibility or impossibility, its modalities, its realization on earth or in the other world, its relationship to the more general problem of the manifestation of Allāh ﷻ and the discussions and polemics related to them, occupy countless pages of Muslim theology and, indeed, constitute important chapters of it. The °Imāmite position is marked by two complementary ideas, and its originality is due to the place it accords here again to the °Imām ﷺ, on the one hand, and going beyond speculative theological reasoning to arrive at a lived, contemplative, and direct interior experience on the other. Imamites thus believe that they avoid the two “traps” of *tashbīh* and *ta'tīl*¹². First, the impossibility of ocular vision of Allāh, in this world as well as in the other, is professed.

12. assimilationism that tends to anthropomorphize or materialize the Divine Being, and agnosticism that tends to strip Allāh of any ontological consistency

He writes “In one of the stories of ʾImām Jaʿfar عليه السلام, which he claims comes from his ‘fathers’, the earlier ʾImāms عليهم السلام, it is reported that once the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم encountered a man who was praying with his eyes raised to the sky. He said to the man: “Lower your eyes, for you will not see Him.” Brought by a disciple to the house of the eighth ʾImām, the traditionist Abū Qurra said to the ʾImām, “It is said that Allāh تعالى divided Hearing [*kalām*, lit. ‘the Word’ although here it is a case of hearing the Divine Word] and Vision between two Prophets عليهم السلام; Hearing went to Mūsā عليه السلام, and Vision went to Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. ar-Ridā عليه السلام replied: “But who was it that preached divine revelation to the jinn and to men: ‘Sight can not reach Him, but He can reach sight.’ (Qurʾān 6:103), ‘they do not encompass Him at all with their sight.’ ‘Nothing is *like* Him’ (Qurʾān 42:11)? Was it not Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم?... Then how could he have said that I have seen Allāh تعالى with my eyes, that I have encompassed Him with my knowledge, or that Allāh تعالى has a form? Aren’t you ashamed? No, heretics [*zanādiqa*] cannot accuse the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم of contradiction.”

“Allāh تعالى, as such in His quiddity, is the thing on the subject of which man cannot speak save but negatively by refusing everything that might give a conceivable representation (apophatically). Actually, in the traditions of a purely theological character, there is a whole series of negations in the words of ʾImāms عليهم السلام on the subject of Allāh تعالى: negation of a conception of body or form (*jism/surah*) negation of space (*makān*), of time (*zamān*), of immobility and movement (*sukūn/haraka*), of descent and ascent (*nuzūl/suʿūd*), of qualification and representation (*tawsīf /tamthīl*), and so on.”

Allāh تعالى, however, in His infinite mercy, wanted His creatures to be able to know Him, and gave Himself a certain number of names, or attributes; some of these attributes concern the Essence of Allāh تعالى (*dhāt*), while others are attributes of His Act (*faiʿl*): attributes of Essence are those that Allāh تعالى has given Himself for all eternity, absolutely without the presence of their opposites: Allāh تعالى is always living (*ḥayy*) and He can never be otherwise; He has always been knowing (*ʿalīm*) and can absolutely not be unknowing; likewise, He is just, powerful, seeing, and so forth (kataphatic reality as opposed to apophatic reality). The attributes of Act did not become necessary until after creation; they are those whose opposites can also qualify Allāh تعالى: He is indulgent (*ʾafuww*) but also vengeful (*muntaqim*), He can be satisfied (*rādī*) but also angry (*sākhit*), and so forth. which is what is meant by His تعالى kataphatic reality

These attributes, revealed to humanity in the Most Beautiful Names of Allāh ﷻ, have places of manifestation, “vehicles” or “organs” so that they can be applied to the entirety of creation and to humanity in particular, “organs” thanks to which they become efficient and act upon the created plan. These “vehicles of attributes”, these “active organs” of Allāh ﷻ are the ʾĀʾimmah ﷺ. Throughout their sayings, they ﷺ unceasingly and indefatigably repeat that “we are the eye (ʿayn) of Allāh ﷻ, we are the hand (yad) of Allāh ﷻ, we are His face (wajh), His heart (qalb), His tongue (lisān), His ear (ʿudhḥn). . . We are the Most Beautiful Names of Allāh ﷻ.”

It is through these “organs” that the creatures and humans in particular are led to know the attributes of Allāh ﷻ. Thus, two ontological plans of the Divine Being can be distinguished: the first is the plan of Essence, indescribable, inconceivable, beyond all intelligence, intuition, or thought; this is the plan of the Unknowable, of Allāh ﷻ (*Deus absconditus*) in His vertiginous, unmanifested concealment. The other is the plan of Acts performed by the organs of Allāh ﷻ, the ʾĀʾimmah ﷺ, instruments capable of making known to the creatures what can be known of Allāh ﷻ; this is the plan of the manifest Allāh ﷻ, (*Deus revelatus*), of the unknown aspiring to be known. It is also to support this sense that the ʾImām ﷺ is described as being the “Proof of Allāh ﷻ” (*hujjatu-llāh*), the “Vicar of Allāh ﷻ” (*khaīfatu-llāh*), the “Path of Allāh ﷻ” (*sirātu-llāh*), the “Gateway to Allāh ﷻ” (*bābu-llāh*), or described by such Qurʾānic expressions as “the Supreme Sign” (*al-ʾāyatu-l-kubrā*) (79:20), “the August Symbol” (*al-mathala-l-aʿlā*) (16:60), “the Most Solid Handhold” (*al-urwatu-l-wuthqā*), (2:256 and 31:22)

One might wonder whether in this division between Essence and Organ if there is a transposition, on the divine level, of the omnipresent division of all reality into *al-bāṭin* and *adḥ-ḍḥāhir*.

The esoteric, the hidden aspect not manifested by Allāh ﷻ would thus become His Essence, eternally inaccessible; His Organs, that is, His exoteric, His revealed aspect, would be the ʾImām ﷺ in his ontological sense, including His historical manifestations, that is, the imams of all ages. So knowledge of the reality of the ʾImām is the equivalent to knowledge of that which can be known of Allāh ﷻ.

In the words of al-Husayn ﷺ, “Allāh ﷻ created His servants so that they might know Him, for when they know Him they worship Him and thus free themselves from the worship of anything that is not Him by the truth of “they they know Him.” and not some other.

Someone then asked: “What is knowledge of Allāh ﷻ?” “It is, for the people of each age, knowledge of the ʾImām ﷺ to whom they owe both obeisance and obedience.”

Here we begin to touch on the very heart of the matter.

“He who dies without recognizing the ʾImām ﷺ of his time dies the death of ignorance (*jahiliyah*).”

“He who dies without *bayaʿah* dies the death of *Jahilyah*.” *Muṣṣnad* Aḥmad bin Hanbal, Vol. 4 page 94 Hadith 16271; *Kanz ul Ummal*, Vol. 1 hadith 463 & 464; *Muṣṣnad* Abu Daud, Ḥadith 2013;

“Whoever dies without being bound by the oath of allegiance (*bayaʿah*), dies the death of the time of ignorance.” [Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim]

This oath of allegiance (*bayaʿah*) is directly incumbent upon the leaders of the Muslim community (*ahl al-hal wa al-ʾaqd*) and must be given on the authority of the Qurʾān and Sunnah according to the conditions set forth in ʾIslāmic Law.

Even though the individual in this case does not give the oath of allegiance directly, he is bound by it. He is required to obey in all matters that do not entail disobedience to Allāh ﷻ.

“Knowing” in this context does not mean *just* knowing their names and persons, but it means recognizing the fact that they *are* the authorities after the Prophet ﷺ, as he himself has said: “Whoever dies not knowing the ʾImām of his time surely dies the death of the age of ignorance,” and the meaning of knowing them is loving them and their *wilayat* is the love and it is that *wilayat* that is obligatory upon “those who follow righteousness and goodness.”

Here we must add a few words on *wilayat*.

Wilayat is derived from *wilaʾ*, meaning power, authority or a right of certain kind. In this context “*wilayat*” is the authority invested in the Prophet ﷺ and then ʿAlī ﷺ (as a result of the event of Ghadir al-Khumm) and, then, his immediate successors and their deputies as ﷺ the true representatives of Allāh ﷻ on this earth.

Wilayat has four dimensions:

The right of love and devotion (*wilayatu-l-muḥabbah*): This right places the Muslims under the obligation of loving the Ahlu-l-Bayt ﷺ. ʾImām ʿAlī ﷺ said, “By Allāh, the One who has spilt the grain and created the soul, verily the Prophet ﷺ has promised that none shall love me but the believer and none shall hate me but the hypocrite.” Jabir bin ʿAbdullah al-Anṣari ﷺ and Abu Saʿīd al-Khudārī ﷺ, two famous companions of the Prophet, used to say: “We did not identify the hypocrites but by their hatred for ʿAlī.”

Love for the Ahlu-l-Bayt is enshrined in verse 42:23.

لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

lā °as°alukum °alayhi °ajāran °illa-l-mawaddata fī- l-qurba

I do not ask any reward of you (for my teachings)

but the love of those who are near

(*al-qurb* = my kin).

Further dimensions include the authority of spiritual guidance (*wilayatu-l-°imāmat*): this reflects the power and authority of the Ahlu-l Bayt ؑ in guiding their followers in spiritual matters.

The authority in socio-political guidance (*wilayatu-l-zi°amat*): this dimension of *wilayat* reflects the right that the Ahlu-l Bayt ؑ have to lead the Muslims in social and political aspects of life.

And finally the authority of the universal nature (*wilayatu-l-tasarruf*): this dimension reflects universal power over the entire universe that the Prophet ؐ and Ahlu-l Bayt ؑ have been vested with by the grace of Allāh ؑ.



As we said in relation to the question of the vision of Allāh ؑ. This problem, its possibility or impossibility, its modalities, its realization on earth or in the other world, its relationship to the more general problem of the manifestation of Allāh ؑ and the discussions and polemics related to them, occupy countless pages of Muslim theology but in the end it all just goes round and round between the apophatic and kataphatic vision of Reality.

Amir-Moessi says “Our position is marked by two complementary ideas, and its originality is due to the place it accords here again to the °Imām (as ‘organ’ or teacher or the one who clarifies or makes known what is unknown), on the one hand, and going beyond speculative theological reasoning to arrive at a lived, contemplative, and direct interior experience on the other. We believe that it is possible to avoid the two “traps” of *tashbīh* and *ta’tīl*.¹³ or anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) or by (*ta’tīl*) which is to absolutely deny any attributes to Allāh ؑ. (“there is nothing like Him”)”

The important phrase in the above which the reader should note is: “going beyond speculative theological reasoning to arrive at a lived, contemplative, and direct interior experience.”

13. Again remember that assimilationism that tends to anthropomorphize or materialize the Divine Being, and agnosticism tends to strip Allāh ؑ of any ontological consistency

Backing up again let us reiterate that for the Sunnis, the °Imām ؑ of the time who is necessarily al-Mahdi ؑ, is not yet born or may be born but is still under the age of 40 and living unknown to the people until it is time for him to manifest; and the Shi'ah position is that he is born, and has been alive for almost a thousand years,¹⁴ but is in Occultation and will not appear until the “time is right”.

But if the one or the other is correct then how does one explain, more importantly, realize the truth of “He who dies without recognizing the °Imām ؑ of his time dies the death of ignorance (*jahiliyah*); or “He who dies without baya'ah dies the death of Jahilyah.” *Musnad* Aḥmad bin Hanbal, Vol. 4 p. 94 Hadīth 16271; *Kanzu-l-Ummal*, Vol. 1 hadith 463/464; *Musnad* Abu Daud, Ḥadīth 2013; or “Whoever dies without being bound by the oath of allegiance (*baya'ah*), dies the death of the time of ignorance.” [Muslim]

And couple that back to: “arriving at a lived, contemplative, and direct interior experience which means an *actual real experience* of the °Imām ؑ.”

In short how do you give your bay'ah to someone who is not here or not present or in occultation or hidden? Because if you can't you will surely die the death of the age of ignorance as one who is *jahl*.

The answer is to be found in *ar-Ru'ya bi-l-qalb*.

“The A°mmah ؑ state insistently that Allāh ﷻ can be seen with the heart. Ya°qub bin Ishāq said, “I questioned Abū Muhammad* (the eleventh imam, al-Ḥasan al-°Askari ؑ) in writing: ‘How can a servant, not seeing his Lord, worship the Lord?’ He replied by hand: ‘Abū Yūsuf! My master and lord, He whose benefits have honored my ancestors and myself is too transcendent to be seen.’ I then asked: ‘And the Prophet? Has he seen the Lord?’ He replied by hand: ‘Allāh ﷻ has made visible to the heart of His Messenger what He has wanted to show of the light of His Majesty.’” One of the Khawārij asked the fifth °Imām, Abū Ja°far al-Bāqir: “‘O Abū Ja°far, what do you worship?’” [I worship] Allāh ﷻ Most High.” “Have you seen Him?” He can *not* be seen with the eyes, but hearts can see Him through the realities of faith; Allāh ﷻ cannot be known by analogy or apprehended by the senses or compared to humans; He is described by signs, recognized by indices – by traces (اشار).” This vision with the heart is presented not only as possible, but necessary, constituting one of the indispensable conditions of true faith.

14. some people balk at al-Mahdi e being alive for a thousand years but routinely express or accept that the Prophet Nūh ؑ lived 1050 years, not to mention Adam ؑ who lived 930 years and what of the ‘life’ of Khidr ؑ?

A Jewish religious scholar (*hibr*) asked °Alī ؑ, “Oh prince of believers! Do you see the Lord when you devote yourself to worship?” °Alī ؑ replied, “Beware! I would not worship a G-d that I could not see.”

“But how did you see Him?” asked the scholar. °Alī ؑ said “Beware! the eyes cannot see Him with the glance; it is rather hearts that see Him through the realities of faith.”

Vision is possible only when there is similarity of nature between the seeing subject and the seen object!

Allāh ﷻ, in his Essence, remains a “thing” absolutely different from other things; what remains forever invisible is the divine Essence, since it transcends absolutely everything, including vision. But at the same time, Allāh ﷻ, in His manifested aspect (the “signs”, the “indices”, “the traces (*athar*/اثر)”) said the fifth °Imām ؑ is visible to the heart of the “believer”. The two “phases” of the theory of the vision of Allāh ﷻ are illustrated by two speeches of Ja°far as-Šādiq ؑ; the first comes in a commentary concerning the request by Mūsā ؑ to see Allāh ﷻ:

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَىٰ لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنْظُرْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ تَرَانِي

Wa lamma jā°a mūsā li-mīqātinā wa kallamahu rabbuhu
qala rabbi arinee anḏhur °ilayka qala lan tarānī

When Mūsā arrived at the appointed time
his Lord spoke to him, he [Mūsā] said:

“Oh Lord, reveal Yourself to me that I may behold You.”

[Allāh said] “You cannot see Me”

(Surat al-°A°rāf 7:143)

The °Imām ؑ says, “In relation to the Lord, three things are impossible for servants: manifestation (theophany/*at-tajallī*/تجلى), access (*wasla*), and knowledge (*ma°rifah*); for no eye can see Him, no heart can reach Him, no intellect can know Him.” Elsewhere, the °Imām ؑ gives this reply to a disciple who asked him about the raptures (*ghāshiyah*/غاشية) that the Prophet ﷺ was in when revelation “descended upon” him: “It was when there was no longer anyone [to be understood as the absence of the angel of revelation] between Allāh ﷻ, and him; it was when Allāh ﷻ showed Himself to him.” The first speech concerns the divine Essence, not manifested and not manifestable, eternally unattainable, unknowable, inconceivable; the second looks toward the *revealed* Allāh ﷻ, (*Deus revelatus*), His sign, His symbol, “His trace” that is to say, His ‘organ’ i.e. the °Imām ؑ, The Divine Guide.

“What can be revealed through fragments concerning vision with the heart goes in the same direction. What is seen with “the eye of the heart” is a light (*nūr*), or more precisely several modalities of light (*°anwār*) It is located at the center of the heart and is sometimes identified with Hiero-Intelligence (*al-°aql*) which, in the heart is like a lamp in the center of the house.” *al-°Aql*¹⁵ is the means of vision with the heart and in this case it is a synonym of faith (*°īmān*) but at the same time it is reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and, as such, constitutes the object of vision. It is known that the reality of *°aql* is identical to the *°Imam* ﷺ. Hiero-Intelligence or *°aql* is the interior or “hidden” *°Imām* ﷺ which the first thing created by Allāh ﷻ – the pre-existential eternal light of the *°Imam* ﷺ.”

Vision with the heart appears to be practiced by all the principal schools of mystics – schools all tracing back to the original teachings of *°Alī* ﷺ during the 26 years of the Khilafah when he taught while others administered to the political/military/economic needs of the nascent *°ummah*.

“The practice is based on techniques of concentration and recitation of prayers that the masters claim to have received by oral transmission through chains of the initiated that trace back to *°Alī* ﷺ, the historical imams and those initiates of the schools granted permission (*°idhn*) and license (*°ijazāh*) to teach. The subject constitutes one of the greatest secrets of the schools, and in written sources there is typically the greatest discretion about anything that concerns the technical aspects of the practice, or else things are explained using language and expressions that only initiated disciples are supposed to understand. There are, however, some allusions to it, and although they are rare in the texts, they are sufficiently telling to be helpful in our understanding. Among the masters of the Ni°matullāhi school, Muzaffar *°Alī Shāh* (d. 1215/1801), writes in his Persian treatise entitled *The Red Sulfur*. “The real spiritual heart is the place of manifestation of the Light of Allāh and the Mirror of the epiphanies of the Presence of the *°Imām* (*mawlā*).” we are here speaking of a subtle divine entity, an immaterial spiritual entity.”

15. *al-°Aql* (العقل) can be thought of as a mode of intelligence which arises when the mind and the heart are working in perfect and complete harmony with each other. This state of harmony arising from *al-°aql* is the faculty for apprehending the divine, a faculty of metaphysical perception, a light in the heart, through which one can discern and recognize signs from Allāh ﷻ. The term *°aql* came to replace and expand the pre-Islamic concept of *ḥilm* (حلم) "serene justice and self-control, dignity" in opposition to the negative notions of ignorance (*jahl*) and stupidity (*safah*)

He writes, “And the physical form of this real heart is the carnal organ in the pineal shape located on the left side of the chest cavity, and which is like a window that faces right to the subtle spiritual entity like the vicar of this immaterial entity. Any abstract epiphany that takes place in the spiritual heart is manifested in a form or a concrete representation in the physical heart. The perfect form, the representation of the perfect Epiphany...is the form of the Human.”

Ṣāliḥī a work by Nūr °Alī Shâh II (d. 1337/1918), another master of the same brotherhood, also contains a number of allusions such as “The Light that is manifested in the heart is that of the °Imām, a Light in the heart of the faithful believer, more brilliant than that of the sun. In fact, there is no common measure, the Light of the °Imām is the manifestation of the Light of Allāh [or of Truth, *ḥaqq*] and that of the sun is only darkness and dust. °Alī ؑ said (in Arabic in the text), “To know me as Light is to know Allāh and the knowledge of Allāh is the knowledge of me as Light; he who knows me as Light is a believer whose heart has been tested for faith by Allāh.”

°Imām Ja°far b. Muḥammad aṣ-Ṣādiq ؑ, alluding to this, said, “Our Cause is difficult; the only ones able to bear it are a Prophet sent by Allāh ﷺ, an angel brought Near (*al-muqarabbīn*), and a faithful believer whose heart has been tested by Allāh ﷻ for faith.” (al-Saffar al-Qummi, *Basā'ir ad-Darajat*, sec. 1, ch. 11)

To continue, “The Light of the heart is considered to be the interior °Imām of the mystic; [as such] it is consciousness and vision of this truly Hidden °Imām as well as obedience in his regard that guarantee progress on the spiritual path.

“This understanding leads to one of the greatest secrets of the heart (*asrāra-l-qalbī*) that the simple curious seldom can discover. Understanding depends on the unveiling of the heart from which only the lords of these hearts can profit...The reason for the name ‘Holy’ °Imām ؑ,” or the °Imamu-l-Gḥayb ؑ (Hidden °Imām ؑ) or other appellations like “the Confidant of Souls” (*anīsa-n-nufūs*) or “the Sun of suns” (*shamsu-sh-shumūs*) is the shining of the Light of his Love (*nūru-l-walāyat*) in the heart of faithful believers (*mu°minīn*).”

This truly holy Light does not belong to him alone. In the deep truth (*ḥaqqiqah*) all the °Imāms ؑ are, in fact, Divine Light sent down for us creatures. “Grasp the true value of unveiling the secrets of the hearts of the holy Friends and hide them from those who are not worthy and remember who does not know the °Imām ؑ surely dies in ignorance.”

In other words it is not a matter of waiting for the Mahdī ﷺ to be born or the Mahdī ﷺ to return but, rather, it is a matter of purification of the heart so what was always there may be known, but cannot be known without the pure vision of the unknown which must manifest, but only the pure of heart may *see* that vision unless perchance one is chosen without ever knowing why one has been chosen.

There are a number of common elements in the visionary experiences of Sunni and Shī'ah mystics: Light...and the fact that at a certain point of the experience the Light is manifested in a human form, and that this form is identified, perceived, and experienced as being the luminous form of the Master, and the fact that, thanks to this Master of Light, the mystic attains Knowledge.

Vision with (or in) the heart might have been the spiritual practice par excellence of early 'Imāmism for the 'Ā'immaḥ presented it as being the condition of authentic worship and undoubtedly initiated their closest disciples into it. Does not the consecrated expression "the faithful believer whose heart has been tested by Allāh ﷻ for faith (*al-mu'min 'imtahana-llāhu qalbahu li-l-'imān*)," often used by the 'Imāms ﷺ, not refer to the disciple who has passed the test of initiation into the "technique" of vision with the heart? Is this not because such a faithful servant has had the vision of the Light of the 'Imām and attained the source of Knowledge, that he is always placed by the 'Imāms ﷺ on a level of equality with a Prophet ﷺ (*nabī mursal*) sent by Allāh ﷻ and an angel of Proximity (*malak muqarrab*)? The practice probably entailed a particular kind of concentration and repetition of sacred phrases, but to our knowledge there is nothing in the early corpus on the subject of a required posture. What is seen in the heart are different modalities or colors of the Light of hiero-intelligence or of the Imam, that is, the luminous form of the 'Imām, the Guide, the Teacher, the One who makes Clear, the Supreme Symbol, the Sign, and the Proof *par excellence*, the Manifestation of what can be manifested by Allāh ﷻ.

We have seen the extremely reticent and critical position of the 'Imāms ﷺ vis-à-vis exclusively speculative theology. It appears as though according to the 'Imāms ﷺ proximity to, and the knowledge of, the divine plan do not happen by theological speculations, methods of dialectical reasoning, or personal attempts at rationalization (*kalām, qiyās, ra'y, ijtihād*), but through direct living experience, that interior experience of what can be seen and known of Allāh ﷻ, that is to say, of His apparent manifestation, in the form of the Hidden 'Imām ﷺ.

It is through this experience, where love (al-walāyah/ولاية) for the Imām ﷺ plays a fundamental role, through which, according to the A'immaḥ, true faith is realized. A faith *beyond* assimilationism (*tashbīh*) we do not speaking of Allāh ﷻ as such but of His apparent manifestation) and agnosticism (*ta'til*) the knowledge of Allāh ﷻ dismissed in the name of an absolute apophatic theology).

Vision with the heart appears to be the means *par excellence* of bringing about this experience: the vision of the Imām of Light of whom the ontological Imām is the archetype and the historical Imām is the manifestation available to the senses. Thus, the initiatory practice, quite probably accompanied by prayers, with sacred phrases, becomes an actualization, a repetition of the primordial event of the pre-existential Initiation where the shadows of the “pure beings” learned secret phrases from the luminous form of the Hidden Imām ﷺ and repeated them in his presence. The A'immaḥ ﷺ present their doctrine as being that of the Secret, enclosing well-guarded secrets: “Our doctrine is a secret contained within a secret, a well-protected secret, a secret that is of advantage only to a secret, a secret veiled by a secret.” “Our doctrine is hidden, sealed by the pre-temporal Pact (العهد/ahd). Allāh ﷻ will make him who reveals it, ignoble.” “Our doctrine is the Truth, the Truth of the Truth, it is the exoteric and the esoteric and the esoteric of the esoteric; it is the secret and the secret of the secret, a well-protected secret, hidden by a secret.” As regards vision with the heart, undoubtedly one of the greatest secrets of the teaching, one might think that the ontological Imām ﷺ is the contents of the Secret, contents seen in the secret of the heart, and the historical Imām ﷺ its container and he who initiates the faithful believer. Only the faithful believer, the beneficiary of the Light of the Hidden Imām ﷺ of his heart, is said to be able to penetrate, for the same reason as a prophet or an archangel, the secrets of the teaching: “Our teaching is arduous, very difficult; the only ones who can stand it [var: “can add their faith to it”] are a Prophet ﷺ sent from Allāh ﷻ, an angel of Proximity, or a faithful believer whose heart has been tested by Allāh ﷻ for faith.”

According to our hypothesis, the technical ‘allusions’ to vision with the heart in the early corpus of the A'immaḥ (إمامة) would be the earliest attestation of a spiritual practice in Islām, practice which would later be in widespread use among mystics in both Sunnism and Shi'ism, at the same time it demonstrates the experiential aspect of the interiorized Hidden Imām ﷺ who alone can make known the Truth of the Time and put an end to one's ignorance (*jahiliyyah*).

What, in all of this we are trying to clarify, is that there are those who are “waiting” for the °Imām al-Mahdi ﷺ who is yet to be born or in the depths of seclusion, and those who are in contact with the °Imām who is “hidden” within the purified heart who are directly in contact with the °Imām and, indeed, are being taught by him ﷺ.

In a long ḥadīth, Ja‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq ﷺ describes the circumstances of the conception and birth of an °Imām (leader, protector, teacher) for a group of his disciples who accompanied him on a pilgrimage to Makkah. I will skip the part dealing with his ﷺ conception for that is unique to the specificity of the particular °Imām but here we speak of all those who partake of the secret of the spiritual birth in the presence of the Hidden °Imām, the Teacher, the Guide etc.

...Once born, the child places his hands on the earth, for ‘he receives all the Science of Allāh ﷻ come down from Heaven on earth,’ and raises his head toward the sky, for from the interior of the Throne and on behalf of the Lord of Magnificence, a Herald calls him by name and by the name of his father (guide, teacher, °imām), and this from the Supreme Horizon (*al-‘ufuq al-a‘lā*) and says: “You are my chosen one among my creatures, the place of my Secret, the repository of my Science, my confidant in my Revelation, my vicar on my earth. I have reserved my Mercy, offered my Paradise, and allowed my Proximity to you and to those who love you with a holy love (*li-man tawallāka*, i.e., all those who feel walāya for you and believe in your walāya, that is, the “true Shi‘ah”,¹⁶ and by my Glory and my Majesty I shall consume with my worst punishments anyone who rises up as an enemy against you, even if in the lower world I allow him to profit from an easy life (lit: “even if I provide for him in this lower world which is Mine, the riches of My provisions”).” Once the celestial Herald stops speaking, the newborn °imām answers:

“Allāh ﷻ has given this testimony, and with Him the angels and those who are endowed with wisdom: there is no other god than He, He who maintains justice, there is no other god than He, the powerful, the wise (Qur‘ān 3:18).” After this word, Allāh ﷻ gives him the “First Knowledge and the Last Knowledge” (*al-‘ilmu-l-awwal wa al-‘ilmu-l-‘ākhir*), and he [the new born °Imām] becomes worthy of the visit of the celestial entity *ar-Ruḥu-l-Quds* ﷻ (the Holy Spirit/الروح القدس) during the night of the Decree (*laylatu-l-qadr*)

16. The People of my Family are like Noah's Ark ; Whoever gets on board the Ark is saved, Whoever does not get on board is carried off by the waves. (The Prophet ﷺ)

In truth (*al-haqqīqah*/حقيقة) the °Imām-Proof existed before the creatures, he exists with them, and he will exist after them. The °Imām, the Divine Guide ﷺ, in both his cosmic, ontological aspect and his historical aspect, dominates and determines world vision. Here, religious conscience perceives creation through the ‘filter’ that the °Imām ﷺ is, in a dizzying vision that goes from a cosmogonic pre-existence to an eschatological superexistence. Without the °Imām ﷺ, the universe would crumble, since he is the Proof, the Manifestation, and the Organ of Allāh ﷻ, and he is the Means by which human beings can attain, if not at the very least knowledge of Allāh ﷻ, at least what is knowable in and of Allāh ﷻ. Without the Perfect Man, without a Sacred Guide, there is no access to the divine, and the world of the seeker is engulfed in darkness.

As such the °Imām ﷺ is the Threshold through which Allāh ﷻ and the creatures communicate. He is thus a cosmic necessity, the key and the center of the universal economy of the sacred: “The earth cannot be devoid of an °imām; without him, it could not last an hour.” If there were only two men left in the world, one of them would be the °Imām.” The universal Order is maintained through the presence of the divine Man: “It is because of us,” say the A°immah, “that the heavens and the earth are maintained” it is because of them “that Allāh ﷻ, keeps the sky from crashing into the earth, and the earth from shaking those who dwell upon it.” Without an °Imām, there is no religion but legalistic structure; without esotericism, exotericism loses its direction, its purpose, its goal, as well as its meaning; without *walāyah* (profound love and solicitude) toward the °Imām ﷺ and *barāʿa* (enmity) toward his Enemy, no duty or obligation in matters of worship can be approved by Allāh ﷻ.

Let it be remembered that it is *walāya* that as a term denotes the ontological-theological status of the °Imām ﷺ as well as faith in this status that the A°immah ﷺ call “the Religion” (*ad-dīn*), “the true Religion” or “the Religion of Truth” (*ad-dīnu-l-ḥaqq*), or even “the solid Religion” (*ad-dīnu-l-qayyim*); the aspects mentioned previously are simply the components, the derivatives, the secondary applications of the *walāyah*.

It might be said, in effect, that if without esotericism, exotericism loses its meaning, then in just the same way without exotericism, esotericism has no ground in which to reside. It is when the “apparent” (*dhāhir*) is deepened that the hidden (*bātin*) can be reached.

The ḍhahir thus constitutes the foundation and the indispensable support of the bātin.

From this point on, and by using the information presented throughout this study, we are able to distinguish at least three complementary and increasingly more “secret” levels in the Teaching attributed to the ʾĀʾimmah ﷺ:

1. An exoteric level. This refers to the teaching of traditional disciplines (Qurʾānic sciences and exoteric law/*fiqh*). With a few exceptions Shīʿah teaching is identical to Sunni teaching. The references to the words of the ʾĀʾimmah ﷺ in Sunni works and the presence of their names in the chains of transmission of some of the more “orthodox” works of ḥadīth or of *fiqh* might be thought of as corresponding to this level of Teaching. Of course, all kinds of faithful Shīʿah and Ṣunnis have had, and have, access to this level.

2. A level that might be referred to as mesoteric, a level for the closest of the disciples which deals with cosmogony, the sacred history of the prophets and earlier ʾImāms ﷺ, as well as with the fight that opposes them to their “enemies”, information about the divine privileges of the ʾImām ﷺ, his ontological status, his initiatory role, his Qurʾan and other secret Books, his miraculous powers, his soteriological and eschatological role, in short, Imamology and its basic theoretical facts.

3. A strictly esoteric, very secret level, lavished upon an elite number of the particularly devoted disciples or seekers. We might distinguish between two different categories of information here. The first is information whose secret nature is provisional: information about the number of ʾImāms and the identity of the Qāʾim ﷺ. The second is information whose secret must be forever safe-guarded: the date of the physical return of the ʾImām ﷺ, or the occult sciences and spiritual teachings whose magical character leads into supernatural powers. We realize that the essential part of the doctrine of the ʾĀʾimmah ﷺ does not address ʿaql in the sense of “logical reasoning,” but it supposes an investment, a total commitment of this ʿaql defined as the internal or Hidden ʾImām ﷺ, (translated elsewhere as “Hiero-Intelligence” or “intuition of the sacred.”)

In fact, the fundamental traits of the Teaching, the cosmogonic details, the initiatory ideas, the esoteric and occult information, the eschatological details, are split up and scattered through various books and chapters in books that most often have no evident logical connection with them. A speech about prayer leads into an exposé on the World of Shadows, comments about the 313 Companions of the Mahdī ﷺ are inserted in an exposé on divine Unicity.

Talks about *political* power may end with an off-hand description of ‘secret’ Books and the rolled Manuscripts of the ʾĀʾimmah ﷺ, and so forth. The reason for this is not only the interdependence and interpenetration of ideas, all of which are connected, but also the esoteric process by which the doctrine is exposed in the form of a real “puzzle,” which essentially appears to aim at two goals: first, safeguarding the secret of the Sacred Knowledge that by nature *must* be difficult to access, since it cannot be passed on to those who are not worthy; and second, putting to the test the perseverance of the faithful believer, who is thus invited to reconstitute the whole from its many and “scattered” parts progressively, through the ʿaql.

The doctrine of the ʾĀʾimmah ﷺ revolves around two central, “polarized” axes. The first is ‘vertical’ and may be characterized by the two complementary poles or side by side shafts defined by pairs such as: *ḍḥāhir/bāṭin* (apparent/hidden or exoteric/esoteric), *nabī/walī* (prophet/ʾimām), *tanzīl/taʾwīl* (literal revelation/spiritual interpretation), Muḥammad ﷺ/ʿAlī ﷺ (the first of whom represents law-giving prophecy, the exoteric part of religion, while the second represents the ʾImāmīte mission that consists in unveiling the esoteric part of the religion), *ʾislām/ʾimān* (submission to exoteric religion/initiation into esoteric religion), and so forth. This axis is by nature ‘vertical’, since the passage from exotericism to esotericism is done in the sense of a progressive approach to the divine and an ever greater knowledge of the secrets of the universe. The second axis is ‘horizontal’ – being characterized by the two “opposite poles” that are defined again by pairs like *ʾimām/ʿaduwwu-l-imām* (ʾimām/enemy of the ʾimām), *ʿaql/jahl* (Hiero-Intelligence/Ignorance), *ashābu-l-yamīn/ashābu-sh-shimāl* (People of the Right/People of the Left), *aʾimmatu-n-nūr/aʾimmatu-ḍḥ-ḍḥalām* (Guides of the Light/Guides of the Darkness), *walāya/barāʾa* (Sacred Love of the Aʾimmah/Sacred Hatred of their Enemies), and so on.

This second axis is “horizontal”. since it determines the history of humanity, a history marked by the opposition between the Aʾimmah (Divine Guides) and their faithful, on the one hand, and the ‘enemies’ of the Aʾimmah and their political partisans on the other. In other words, one might say that the ‘vertical’ axis is the axis of Initiation, running through all phases of creation from the initiation of the shadows of the “pure beings” in the World of Particles, by the pre-existential luminous entities of the Aʾimmah ﷺ up to the universal initiation of the Mahdī ﷺ at the End of Time, passing through the initiation of the disciples by the Aʾimmah ﷺ of each religion.

Thus, the “vertical” axis begins at the beginning of creation and ends with the End of Time, where the difference between exotericism and esotericism is annihilated, where through universal unveiling of the Secret through the offices of al-Mahdī ﷺ, that which is apparent becomes hidden and the hidden becomes apparent.

The “horizontal” axis is that of the perpetual Combat: all the way from the pre-existential and cosmic Combat between the Armies of Hiero-Intelligence and those of Ignorance, to the final Battle of al-Mahdī ﷺ against the forces of Evil, passing through the battle that has forever opposed the A°immah to their enemies. The horizontal axis, with what the stakes are (the combat between the initiated and the counterinitiated, between Light and Darkness), also runs through all the phases of creation from pre-existence to the End of Time; it stops at the End of Time, since after the definitive destruction of the Enemy by the al-Mahdī ﷺ, it will no longer have any reason for its existence: the Adversary, the dominant and persecuting force throughout history, is finally conquered, obliterated, once and for all. Any obstacle to full revelation of the Truth is gone.

Continual Initiation and Perpetual Combat are the two fundamental constants of the “religion” of the A°immah ﷺ; by their nature and movement, these two axes are inextricably and perpetually connected to one another. The faithful °Imāmīte is invited to remain constantly at their point of intersection. Historically, then, at the beginnings of esotericism in °Islām we find an initiatory, mystical, and occultist doctrine. Just as in other esoteric traditions, the process of the spread of teachings obeys the rules of a complex game; without ever having the appearance of being divulged or popularized, The School of the °Ā°immah ﷺ is always destined to be accessible to an elite minority; its development has simultaneously both unveiled and disguised the secret Science. Via allusive statements, technical terms, and the tactic of dispersion, the Secret has remained hidden except for those who are worthy of it. Many things have been said, but it is reasonable to assume that, according to a rule inherent in all esotericism, a fairly complete silence has been kept about many others; in this case, such is probably the case for details regarding the “second and third levels of the Teaching” using our classification. This idea is supported by the fact that ‘keeping the Secret’ (taqiyya/kitmān) is elevated by the °Ā°immah ﷺ to the level of being an article of faith and asacred obligation. “Nine tenths of the Religion (that is, the religion of the °Ā°immah ﷺ) consists in keeping the Secret; whoever does not practice this has no Religion.”

“Keeping the Secret is part of my Religion and that of my ancestors [the preceding ʾimāms]; whoever does not keep the Secret is devoid of Faith [that is, does not practice the doctrine of the ʾimāms].” “He who divulges our teaching is like him who denies it.” “The Rule of Allāh is keeping the Secret.” “Supporting our Cause is not [only] knowing it and admitting it; it is protecting it and keeping it hidden from those not worthy of it.” Finally, let it be added that keeping the Secret is part of Orders of the the Armies of Hiero-Intelligence, and that it is thus elevated to the rank of a virtue of cosmic dimension. The reason invoked is that the mass, “the majority” al-amm led by the “guides of Darkness”, ignorant and fanatical in their blind obedience to exotericism alone, becomes violent when esoteric truths are exposed to them, and they threaten the lives of those who profess these views. The history of humanity is ruled by two kinds of government (*dawla*/دولة): that of Adam ﷺ and that of Iblīs. Under the government of Adam ﷺ, divine Religion is practiced openly (*ʿalāniyatan*/علانية), while under that of ʾIblīs, as is the case with humanity today, the True Religion can only be practiced in secret (*sirrān*/سر). In a general sense, the whole doctrine is presented as being that of the Secret, the esoteric Secret of ʾIslām.¹⁷

We discern in the expression “test of the heart” an allusion to initiation into the spiritual “technique” of vision with the heart, through which the initiated discover the Light of the ʾImām ﷺ in their hearts and thus attain esoteric Knowledge and, often or, at least sometimes, miraculous powers.

Is this tantamount to saying that “vision with the heart,” with the “certainty” and “knowledge” that accompany such vision, is what makes the faithful believer become an intimate Friend of the ʾImām ﷺ? Is it what allows the faithful believer to know the “location” of his Master? Only a small minority know the location of the Hidden ʾImām ﷺ ” and, only a small minority are in contact with him. But this same handful of believers will be able to hide their privilege from the eyes of the world, so that the conditions set up by the Hidden ʾImām ﷺ in his last letter may be respected.

17. For the preceeding section I am totally indebted to the “Excursus” of Amir-Moezzi, “Vision with the Heart” that appears in “The Divine Guide in early Shi’ism (SUNY Press 1994). Indeed there are whole sections of the writing that I have taken directly from his work and other parts that are “collages” of his writing. It may be that I will be sued for doing so but I know that few will take the advantage of reading the text in full and I felt that making this material more widely available would be of help to those are concerned with the appearance of the Hidden Imām ﷺ in their lives. I hope to be forgiven.

Some of these believers are those that later sources called “The Men of the Unseen” (*rijāl al-ghayb*), and about whom it is said that their existence is indispensable to humanity, since they are the ones that will continue to transmit the Divine Science secretly until the outward Return of the Hidden ʿImam ﷺ in the physical world.

At all times an established number of individuals serve as members in the spiritual administration of human and world affairs. It is due to their intervention and presence that this world is kept spinning on its axis. A saying of the Prophet ﷺ testifies to this: “The world shall not perish as long as even a single person says ‘Allāh, Allāh’”. This is a reference to those chosen ones who due to their constant and pure remembrance have attained to the station of nearness to the Divine Presence. These privileged souls have been appointed to their stations and ranks by the Will of the Almighty. They maintain balance and equilibrium in the dispensation of world affairs. It is for their sake that Allāh ﷻ eases His Wrath and bestows His Mercy. Rain is made to descend and barren fields turn green in answer to their supplications. These people of special Grace are not known to the common folk, and are called the Rijālu-l-Ghayb (the hidden or invisible men or souls) and are hidden because humanity is going through a cycle of ignorance and violence and people have lost the sensory organs needed to recognise them lest the Rijāl be killed outright persecuted or confused with those external worldly powers that organise human communities socially or politically.

The Twelve Chiefs (*nuqāb*^ʿ) are the Holders of Sacred Power and intervene in the affairs of the world to prevent ignorance-bred injustice and violence from entirely invading the earth. The Eight Nobles or honorable, chosen ones (*nujabā*) have no earthly power but are the holders of sacred knowledge, and their function is to safeguard and transmit initiatory science. These can also seemingly multiply due to an aspect of their identity known as *budala* (below).

Also the chiefs (*nuqāb*^ʿ) and the nobles (*nujabā*) secretly direct humans towards knowledge of the reality of the Hidden ʿImām ﷻ – they call out to him, they identify him, and make him known to those who need to know.

The Exchanged or Alternates (*budala*) are seven and they possess the power to change from their physical to their spiritual forms; also they can substitute a replica or ‘place holder’ so exactly like themselves in form and movement that no one can distinguish the replica from the real person.

The term derives from the Arabic (*budīla*/بدیل), to change or substitute and each of them are placed over one of the seven heavenly spheres.

The four *awtād* (tent poles or stakes) control the four corners of the world on behalf of the Ḡhawṭh. Ibn ʿArabi said of them, “Through the ʿ*awtād*, Allāh ﷻ preserves and protects the south, the north, the east and the west.” They are in charge of looking after these four directions or dimensions. Their number is confirmed in every age.

The two leaders (ʿ*imāman*) are ʿAbdu-l-Mālik and ʿAbdu-r-Rab, and after the death of the Quṭb one of these two succeeds him as the Quṭb and, in turn, one of the ʿ*awtād* advances to be one of the two ʿ*imāman*. Simultaneously one of the alternates (*budala*) moves to replace the graduated *awtād*. These two ʿimāms or leaders are constantly in attendance on the Quṭb and in, and at, his service.

The Quṭb, often called al-Ḡhawṭh (he who helps or he who brings the rain), is the center of the whole hierarchy. The Quṭb as such is the Central Pole of the ʿawliyāʾ. The one person who forms the focus of the supervision by Allāh ﷻ of the world in every age. He belongs to the heart of ʿIsrafil ﷺ (the angel of resurrection and of form) and he is entrusted with the high station (*wilayatu-l-kubra*) as chief of the ʿawliāʾ-u-llāh ﷺ in every time.

The ʿ*afrād* (sing. *fard* or *mufrad*) are the Unique or Solitary Ones who receive illumination directly from Allāh ﷻ and stand equal to the Quṭb but are not under the direct supervision of the Pole and have no specific function such as that possessed by the Quṭb. The ʿ*afrād* are also aware that they undergo constant fluctuation of knowledge in every breath. The chief of the ʿ*afrād* is al-Khidr ﷺ who drank the Water of Life and still manifests to initiate the holy ones into the Hidden Truths. He is always in this world and has been given ‘insight of the heart’, which is the direct knowledge from the Presence of Allāh ﷻ (ʿ*ilm min ladunnā* / علم من لدنا).

The Trustees (ʿ*umana*) are the custodians of virtue who have responsibility for temporal affairs and are extremely pious people who never make their religious experiences known. They sometimes are known as the *Malamatiyah*, or those who are willing to undergo mis-representation, or even court it, rather than boast of, or even be known for, their piety.

In general Allāh ﷻ conceals His friends from the people (*al-ʿamm*) and only gives information about the ʿawliyāʾ to either others of the ʿawliyāʾ or those who are able to obtain benefits from them.



I am thankful to those of you who who have continued on to this point and I pray you will benefit from it. I know that it may seem that we have veered at times from an explicit exposition of al-Mahdī ﷺ and gone off into other directions/dimensions but that is only because the subject is much misunderstood and has so many dimensions that it is difficult to touch on all of them in a coherent manner.

If I were to sum up I would simply say that, from my perspective, neither the Sunnis nor the Shī‘ah as such really understand al-Mahdī ﷺ and, in fact, their misunderstanding may have tragic consequences of an apocalyptic order just as Christians (especially those possessing atomic bombs) who are awaiting the second coming of ʾIsā ﷺ may also unwittingly bring about an apocalypse due to their mis-reading and mis-understanding of their Book of Revelation.

The People of the Middle Way (*al-ʿummatun wasiṭun*) – the students of ʿImām ʿAli ﷺ and all who stem from him who are aware of the vision of the heart (*ar-ruʿya bi-l-qalb*) know with certainty that it is through the purification of the heart that the Hidden ʾImam ﷺ becomes Known and Apparent and that salvation, in the sense of becoming whole, leads directly to the Peace that passes all understanding no matter the worldly conditions or situation.

The ʾImām ﷺ is here and has always been here before there was a here before any ‘thing’ was to be before.

أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

alāa ʿinna ʿawliyā-llahi lā khawfun ʿalayhim wa la hum yaḥzanūn

“Surely, the friends of Allāh
will feel no fear and have no sadness.”

(Sūrah Yūnus 10:62)

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ فِيكُمْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ

wa ʿiʿlamū anna fī-kum rasūla -llāhi

and know that in you (*fī-kum*) is the Messenger of Allāh

(Sūratu-l-Hujarat 49:7)

this is, of course, an inner or batini reading of the ʾāyat which is usually and most often translated by more ḍḥahiri translators as:

“and know that the Messenger of Allāh is among you.”

overlooking or just hiding the clear meaning of the Arabic phrase *fī-kum* (فِيكُمْ) which simply means “in you” or “within you”.

This is another reason why it is so important to be able to discriminate the meaning between the outer tafsīr and the inner taʾwil.

In speaking of the walī,¹⁸ Henrí Corbin writes, “In fact it is by virtue of the premises and implications that emerge from °Islām when pro-fessed as the religion of love that the concept in the figure of the °Imām appear to us in their ineluctible necessity. In the end the meaning of the °Imām for the most personally experienced kind of spirituality will be found in the *walayah*¹⁹ manifesting as the mean-ing of the °Imām as the object of the *walayah* itself being the initia-tion (*bay‘ah*) of the adept in the knowledge of his own self.

18. wali (ولي) as derived from mawla (مولى) who °Ali ؑ par excellence is and by extension, al-Mahdi ؑ must be. Mawla in the sense of the one who has more authority over believers than they have on themselves It can also mean a much more elevated person, a “master”. “lord”. “vicar” or “guardian”. more importantly and decisively in the saying of the Prophet ﷺ, at Ghadir al-Khumm, “Whose wali I am °Alī is his walī.” and as far as those who say he was only defending Ali ؑ against some disgruntled soldiers, consider this. “Abdul Razaq and Affan narrated from Jaffar ibn Sulaiman from Yazid Al-Rashk from Motref ibn Abdullah from Imran ibn Hussain who said: The Messenger of Allah a had sent an army with °Alī ibn Abi Taalib as their commander to Yemen and he did something in that mission. Affan said: “Then four companions of the Messenger of Allah decided and agreed to report it to the Messenger of Allah a.” Imraan said: “When we came back we met the Messenger a and saluted him.” He said: One of those com-panions stood up and said: O Messenger ﷺ, Alī ؑ did such and such, the Prophet a turned his face from him, then the second one stood up and said: O Messenger of Allah ﷺ Alī ؑ did such and such, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ turned his face from him, then the third one stood up and said: O Messenger of Allah ﷺ, Alī ؑ did such and such, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ turned his face from him too, then the fourth one stood up and said: O Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, Alī ؑ did such and such, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ turned to them and said: “Leave Alī ؑ alone. He is from me and I am from him and he is the Walī of every believer after me.”

Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir comments on this Hadīth and says: “The chain of this hadīth is Ṣaḥīḥ (Authentic), and Yazid Al-Rashq is ibn Abi Yazid and he is Thīqa (Trustworthy) among all scholars as said before. This ḥadīth is narrated by at-Tirmidhī too in the chapter of Faḍl °Alī (merits of °Alī). al-Ḥākim says it is Ṣaḥīḥ (Authentic) in accord with the conditions of Muslim and adh-Dḥābi com‘rms it.”

19. To reiterate: the meaning of walayah (ولاية) means “guardianship”. Walayah is a word which empowers or gives authority/guardianship to a person, community, or country that is under the direction and rule on behalf of another. A “Walī” thus is someone who has “Walayah” (authority or guardian-ship) over somebody else. For example, in fiqh, a father is the walī of his children. The word Walī holds a special importance in °Islāmic spiritual life and it is used with various meanings, which relate to its different functions, which include: “next of kin, ally, friend, helper, guardian, patron, and saint” but the connotations of wali and walayah go beyond what customarily and canonically is understood in the English language by saint and saintliness. In °Islām, the phrase (ولي الله) waliyyu l-Lāh is most often used to denote one vested with the “authority of Allāh ﷻ” or “friend of Allāh ﷻ”.

Once initiated, he or she understands how and why the love of Allāh ﷻ is impossible without the love of the ʾImām ﷺ for it is in the *walayah* as the form of his love that he discovers and verifies the meaning of the words “he who knows himself knows his Lord.”

It is the Hidden ʾImām or the outwardly revealed *Walī* who, as the initiator or the grantor of the bayʿah make it possible to escape from the terrible condition of ignorance (*jāhaliyyah*) bound up in the maxim, “He who does not know the ʾImām of his time dies in ignorance.” It is for this reason alone that we have had to go to such lengths to make sure this is clear to the listener/reader and why we have tried to make clear that neither the Sunni or Shiʿah perspective will ultimately prove of much use save in living in accord with the legalistic religion from which there is no doubt much benefit but...

If you think the ʾImām ﷺ has not yet been born or if you think he ﷺ is deep in occultation how then will you KNOW him and that is the key to the whole of your life? For if you cannot or do not know him, then you will die in the ignorance of *jāhilliyah* (جاهلية)²⁰ which is nothing less than a form of hell.

You MUST KNOW the ʾImam ﷺ, or no matter what you have done in your life you will be ultimately lacking at the end of your life.

This ḥadīth was reported by ʾImām Muslim on the authority of Nafiʿ that the Messenger ﷺ said:

“The one who removes his hand from obedience will meet Allāh without a proof for himself and whosoever dies without a bayʿah on his neck dies the death of *jāhiliyyah*.”

In the first part it says: “The one who removes his hand from obedience will meet Allāh without a proof for himself.”

The obligation of having an ʾImām (a leader, a guide, a true teacher, a murshid or shaykh or pīr is an individual duty. This is because the personal pronoun ‘*man*’ (من) (which means whoever) is from the general expression (*siḡhatu-l-ʾumūm*) and it encompasses all people.

20. *Jahiliyyah* (جاهلية /ignorance) is “ignorance of divine guidance” or “the state of ignorance of the guidance from Allāh ﷻ” and thus cognate with the “Days of Ignorance” before the Prophet a received the revelation which clarified the meaning and purpose of life. To be *jāhl* is to be ignorant, not to know; and also carries the meaning of being foolish, to acting foolishly, to be irrational, disregard facts, to refuse to budge from an adopted position despite evidences, to affect ignorance, to pretend not to know. Allāh ﷻ uses the term *jahl* in the Qurʾān in several of the above senses and, in general parlance, *jahiliyyah* came to signify those pagan times when people were not merely ignorant, but were also *juhala*. It is now applicable to many situations where people are not ignorant, but are *juhala*. Think of Las Vegas or Times Square or Maco or Hollywood or Bollywood or...wherever.

Its nature is such that if the ʾImām ﷺ is present then he is present for all and if he is absent then he is absent for all; thus the obligation covers all people. It is well known in *ʾusulu-l-fiqh* that the general remains general until there is another evidence to specify it.

Both the Sunnis and Shiʿah in affect deny the ʾImām is present by turning the ʾImām ﷺ into an entity who is by their definition absent and thus avoid the necessity of obedience (which some of them have done from the day of Ghadir al-Khumm) and this has yielded the present wretched situation in which the Muslim community finds itself with Muslim killing Muslim and bombing masājid, dealing drugs, kidnapping, ransom and throwing acid in the faces of girls who want not nothing but an education – and worse and worse. We must (and in truth do) have a way out of this present situation which, in truth is nothing less that a new age of jāhilliyyah.

The way out comes through the purification of the heart from the endless junk and trash of mindless and heartless consumption and finding in the purified heart the ʾImām ﷺ, the leader, the guide, the protector and making contact to the point that one actually makes the *ahd* and gives the *bayʿah* from hand to hand and then takes up the life of the middle way by becoming a Muslim who Allāh ﷻ loves and who loves Allāh ﷻ and lives as Allāh ﷻ wishes in the heart of the life of the community of the middle – the ʾummatun wassatun – which is accessed through the teachings of Sayyidinā ʿAlī ﷺ (as we were told to do from the time of the Farewell Ḥajj) and all those who come after him and above all making contact with his representative in the present the Hidden ʾImām ﷺ.

Look around oh reader, and those who hear these words, at what is going down – especially if you are parents or grandparents. Is this a world you want for your self, your children or your grandchildren?

Do you want an apocalypse simply because people cannot imagine how the world can be saved without destroying it?

Do you know that scientists are calculating the death of six *billion* people by 2075 due to the increase of filth in the air that brings disease and the inability to breathe and kills off not only us human beings but animals and plants and so many other living things in order that those who mine and sell coal and drill oil and pump gas can get what they want overnight. For the 1 or 2% who have more and more to the point where one of that 1% recently seriously suggested dropping an atomic bomb in a desert in Iran “to teach them a lesson as to what will happen if they don’t change their ways.” As though the people of Iran were retarded children.

Dear reader or listener realise what is at stake and, importantly, realise there *is* a way out and a way forward.

And, yes, it will require great changes and huge alterations in the lives of people but does anyone have solution. Recently many of us who live in the United States (and many people across the world) were taken in and fooled by a man who ran on the basis that change is possible and “yes we can.”

Tell that to the people of Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria and Libya and Egypt not to mention the almost two million people who have been deported because of the color of their skin or the country from which they came and the tens of thousands of people supposedly living in the richest country in the world who work two jobs and live on food stamps and often as not find themselves living in a shelter for the homeless. All of that under the auspices of a man of color whose father was from Africa and should know and do better.

The politicians, the kings, the dictators, the ignorant mullahs, the killers, corrupters, thugs and murderers are never going to bring about change. They have nothing for us save more of the same.

al-Mahdi ﷺ is not someone reserved for Muslims alone, indeed many Muslims will not accept him as we have mentioned. In almost all religions and wisdom traditions one can find a similar belief in a future world savior. The followers of these religions and traditions believe that there will come a time when the world will become corrupt and engulfed in a crisis. Evil and injustice will become the rule of the day. Disbelief will cover the entire world. At that time the universal savior of all the world will appear. With divine help he will restore the purity of faith and defeat materialism through divine worship. It is not appropriate to confine the deliverer of the world, the Mahdi ﷺ, to one particular nation. He will actually come to destroy discriminatory, claims of racial, creedal and national distinction. Consequently he should be regarded as the Mahdi ﷺ of the whole of humanity. He is the savior and deliverer of all people who worship G-d. His victory is the victory of all the prophets and all the righteous ones on earth. He will be restoring the religion of the prophets ʾIbrāhīm, Mūsā ﷺ, ʿIsā ﷺ and all of the heavenly revelations and this will be the pure religion of Mūsā ﷺ ʿIsā ﷺ which foretold the prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ, Mercy to all the worlds.

And the truly amazing thing is that al-Mahdī ﷺ is right here, and has always been right here, waiting to be discovered in the hearts of those who have the courage, willpower, and the strong internal motivation (*himmah*/همة) to purify their hearts.

Brief notes on the Purification of the Heart

The heart may be sensitive or insensitive, awake or asleep, healthy or sick, whole or broken, open or closed. In other words, its perceptive ability will depend on its capacity and condition. Life continuously presents us with multiple ambiguous situations. How can we know whether we are following the concealed desire of the false self (*nafs*) or the guidance of the heart?

اللَّهُ نَزَلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانِي تَقْشَعُرُ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ
رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكِ هُدًى لِّلَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهَا مَنِ
بَشَاءُ ۚ وَمَنِ اضْطَلَّ لِلَّهِ فَلَا مَوْلِيَ لَهُ ۗ

Allāhu nazzala °aḥsana-l-ḥadīthi kitāban mutashābihan
mathāniya taqshā°irru minhu julūdu
alladhīna yakḥshawna rabbahum ṭhumma talīnu julūduhum
wa qulūbuhum °ilā ḍḥikri-llāhi
ḍḥālika huda-llāhi yaḥdī bihi mañy-yashā°u
wa mañy-yuḍlilī-llāhu famā lahu min hādā
Allāh sent down in parts the best of sayings
as a Book fully consistent in itself,
and whose words corroborate, expound and refer to one another.
The skins of those who stand in awe of their Lord shiver
at (the hearing and understanding of) it.
Then, their skins and their hearts come to rest
in the Remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allāh.

This is the guidance of Allāh,
by which He guides whomever He wills.
And whomever Allāh leads astray, there is no guide for him.
(Sūratu-z-Zumar 39:23)

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ
alladhīna °āmanū wa taṭma°innu qulūbuhum bi-ḍḥikri-llāh:
ala bi ḍḥikri-llāhi taṭma°innu-l-qulūbā

those who have °imān²¹
and whose hearts find tranquillity in the remembrance of Allāh.
Only in the remembrance of Allāh do hearts find tranquillity.
(Sūrah ar-Ra°d 13:28)

21. °Imān (إيمان), usually traslated as faith or belief, actually means, in the words of the Prophet ﷺ, “None of you believes until he loves for his brother or his neighbor what he loves for himself.” (لَا يَحِلُّ دَمٌ أَوْ مَالٌ مِنْكُمْ يَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا) “لا يَحِلُّ دَمٌ أَوْ مَالٌ مِنْكُمْ يَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا” (Source: Ṣaḥīḥ Bukḥārī 13, Judged: Ṣaḥīḥ)

The *nafs* acquires the qualities of servanthood and humility in relation to the Divine Majesty, and the heart becomes sensitive and expansive – expansive enough, in fact, to contain the whole universe.

When the heart is healthy, its desires will be healthy. The healthy heart requires the nourishment of spiritual foods.

If the heart has nourished itself only on the desires of physical existence, it is deprived of life-giving nourishment; and its desires become less healthy and increasingly more sickly.

The healthy heart requires the nourishment of spiritual foods. When the heart is healthy, its desires will be healthy. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The heart of the faithful is the throne of the Merciful.” (قَلْبُ الْمُؤْمِنِ عَرْشُ الرَّحْمَنِ). And it is said in a well-known Hadīth Qudsī: (لَا تَسْعُنِي أَرْضِي وَلَا سَمَائِي، بَلْ يَسْعُنِي قَلْبُ عَبْدِي الْمُؤْمِنِ). Neither [the vastness of] My earth, nor [that of] My heaven can contain Me. Indeed it is the heart of the man of faith which can contain Me. When the heart has nourished itself only on the desires of physical existence, it is deprived of life-giving nourishment, and its own desires become less sound, more sickly.

Purity of the heart refers to the heart’s overall soundness and health. The heart, if it is truly a healthy heart, is in contact with Spirit. But to achieve this rapport with Spirit (*ruh*/روح), it must be purified and made receptive all the way down to the subconscious level.

Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīyah, (رابعة العدوية) said, “I am fully qualified to work as a doorkeeper, and for this reason: What is inside me, I don’t let out. What is outside me, I don’t let in. If someone comes in, he goes right out again. He has nothing to do with me at all. I am a doorkeeper of the heart, not a lump of wet clay.” We can assume the responsibility of being the doorkeeper of our own heart, choosing what we wish to keep within the intimate space of our own being.

Šūfism (*taṣawwuf*/تصوف) has four stages in purification of the heart:

- 1.) Liberating ourselves from the psychological distortions and complexes that prevent us from forming a healthy and integrated individuality.
- 2.) Freeing ourselves from the slavery to the attractions of the world, all of which are secondary reflections of the qualities within the heart. Through seeing these attractions as veils over our one essential yearning, the veils fall away and the naked reality remains.
- 3-) Transcending the subtlest veil that is the self and its selfishness.
- 4-) Devoting oneself and one’s attention to Allāh ﷻ; living in and through Allāh ﷻ, in essential truth (*ḥaqīqqahī*/حقيقة), and in the Protection of Love (*walāyyah*/ولاية).

Without the power of Love, we can only love our self (*nafs*) and the world. Without the Center of Light in our hearts which is the Hidden ʾImam ﷺ, we are fragmented and dispersed in the multiplicity.

By living in and through the Center we become still and at peace. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Make all your cares into a single care, and then Allāh ﷻ will attend to all your cares.” The real and true friends of Allāh (ʿawliya-llāh/أولياء الله) are not occupied with power, self-importance or acquisition, because they are with Allāh ﷻ.

The Prophet Mūsā ﷺ said: “Yā Rabb, are you close enough for me to whisper in your ear or so distant that I should shout?” And Allāh ﷻ said, “I am behind you, before you, at your right and at your left. Oh Mūsā, I am sitting next to my servant whenever he remembers Me, and I am with him when he calls Me.”

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

faʿadhkurūnī ʿadhkurkum

Remember Me — I will remember you.

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:152)

Those who turn toward their own heart enter the world of spiritual qualities, and they find there the source of every quality that they projected onto the outer world. Finally they understand that all they were and are seeking for is truly within their own heart.

كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَتَدَّهَمُ بَرُوحَ مِنْهُ
وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ

kataba fī qulūbihimu-l-ʾīmāna wa ayyadahum bi rūḥin minhu
wa yudākhiluhum jannatin tajārī min taḥtiha-l-anhāru khālidīna fihā
raḍiya-llahu ʿanhum wa raḍū ʿanh

He has engraved faith on their very hearts
and has strengthened them with a spirit of His own.

He will usher them into Gardens through which rivers flow
where they shall dwell forever.

Allāh is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him.

(Sūrah al-Mujadila 58:22)



So dear reader and/or listener I have just about reached the end of this *bayan* on al-Mahdī – the Hidden ʾImām and al-Qaʾim ﷺ.

I admit it has been at times a circuitous route but the subject is complex and there are many sides to it both horizontal and vertical as well as esoteric (*bāṭin*) and exoteric (*dhāhir*).

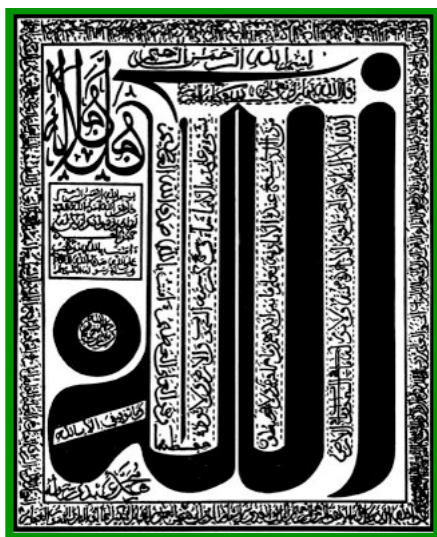
Again I stress there is no one way without the other, no inner without the outer and, surprisingly to many Muslims today, nor outer without the inner. The last being in fact a large part of the reason why we are in such a desperate situation in places like Syria and its like mainly due, from my own perspective, to our refusal to obey the instructions that the Prophet ﷺ provided us with at Ghadir al-Khumm and our subsequent (and continuing) choice of political solutions and political leaders to help us solve our problems rather than spiritual solutions and spiritual leaders.

I pray in these times you will not be taken in by one side or another but, rather, choose the middle and center amid the chaos that has arisen from this terrible destruction of people, lives and what they have tried to build coupled with their desperation to find a solution which is no solution because the solution is – as we have sought to make clear – a spiritual one rather than a political one.

I also counsel you with the words of Sayyidina ʿAlī رضي الله عنه: “During civil disturbances adopt such an attitude that people do not attach any importance to you – they neither burden you with complicated affairs, nor try to derive any advantage out of you.”

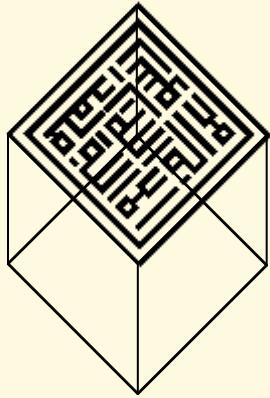
Above all continue in remembrance (*dhikr*) and in that remembrance be sure to remember that the one who does not know the ʿImām of his time dies in ignorance – and ignorance is just another name for Burning in Hell. If you do not know the ʿImām ﷺ do not waste your time but seek him. Now!

wa-llahu-ʿalim





“Take my hand I’m a stranger in paradise.”



noon hierographers

green mountain

virginia

usa